"Ceaselessly Into the Past": Noir, Fascination, and Nostalgia in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

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by

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Abstract

The re-emergence in popular culture of two narratives rooted in noir sensibilities—*The Great Gatsby,* reimagined in Baz Luhrmann's forthcoming film adaptation and Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, recently named BFI's Greatest Film of All Time—partakes in both nostalgic return and an attempt to understand our own troubled American identity. This study explores *Gatsby*'s and *Vertigo*'s profound thematic and formal connections with film noir and its engagement with early twentieth century crises of identity. These narratives share a paradoxical fear of and desire for the past. Both texts also share noir's capacity to inspire fascination in critical and noncritical audiences alike. My thesis probes these latest vogues of *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* as instances of America's durable fascination with noir narratives; I focus on the ways that the texts' narrative and formal properties inspire nostalgic confusion between ideal and reality that marks subsequent adaptations, critical writing, and audience responses.

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While researching and writing this project sometimes *I* felt a little like a boat being borne back ceaselessly into the past—there was always something new to read, or write, or rewrite, and it seemed at times that I would never finish. Several people helped keep me keep paddling, nevertheless, that deserve recognition. I want to thank my thesis advisor, Pat Collier, for his insightful comments and continued confidence that it would all come together in the end. Thanks are also due to Amit Baishya, who worked with me to polish an abbreviated version of this thesis for presentation at the Butler Undergraduate Research Conference in March 2013. This project is a much more interesting read in large part to his excellent book recommendations. Many thanks also go to my long-suffering friend and roommate Sam Roderick, who kindly acted as a sounding board and/or shoulder to cry on at every stage of the process.

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Introduction/Author's Statement

> Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
> If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
> Till she cry 'Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
> I must have you!'
>
> - Thomas Parke D'Invilliers (*Gatsby* 1)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, in addition to being "classic" American texts with ties to the film noir genre, both explore the role of nostalgia in identity formation through their protagonists' idolization of an ideal other. The kinship between *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* also lies in the ways in which they tempt their audiences, critical and non-critical alike, to participate in this idealization and nostalgia. This effect is largely due to their function as mise-en-abyme (in English, placed into the abyss, or center), which describes a work of art that reflects and reinforces itself through repetition, making a kind of "internally contained scale model" of itself (Hobson 75). The traditional example is the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*. Both *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* extend their mise-en-abyme outward from the text; individual elements of the text function like stones dropped in a pond, where each ripple expanding outwards represents one reflection of its nostalgia and idealization, from one character, to another character, to narrative form, and finally to their authors, audiences, adaptors, and critics.

From the very beginning, both texts reveal the way in which they are going to blur the fictional world and the real world through nostalgic idealization; ironically, this revelation only becomes apparent with the second reading. *Gatsby*, narrative-within-a-narrative, is perhaps the most obvious example of mise-en-abye; it tells the story of Jay Gatsby's obsession with Daisy Buchanan purportedly recorded by the novel's Gatbsy-obsessed narrator, Nick Carraway. *Gatsby*'s fixation on making conspicuous the process of reading and the indeterminacy of

identity is, in retrospect, given one final turn of the screw in its famous epigraph about the "gold-hatted" lover. The poem is attributed to Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, a fictional poet invented by Fitzgerald who also appears as a character in his novel *This Side of Paradise*. The inclusion of this sly fiction on the fringes of the fictional text, in a space usually reserved for interpreting one's own work through someone else's words, sends tendrils of unreality creeping outward from the text towards the reader, into the interstitial spaces between fiction and reality.

Likewise, *Vertigo* is not only often considered allegorical of the filmmaking process itself, but also, as Katie Trumpener notes, self-referentially reflects and doubles characters, narrative events, settings, dialogue, camera shots, and musical themes (180). This effect is perhaps best epitomized by the film's credits sequence, another repetition which foreshadows the psychological drama to follow. In the sequence, a graphic spiral containing the film's title emerges from a woman's eye in close-up, eventually expanding past the boundaries of the film's frame to seemingly envelop the audience. We lose perspective: is the spiral rising upward to meet us, or are we falling into it? This spiral becomes a metaphor for the ways in which the film will draw its audience in its cycle of idealization, making them another ripple, another turn of the spiral: these moments of internal reflection in both texts originate with one character's idealization of another, an image that so definitively blurs the line between fiction and reality that these narratives often draw readers and viewers into their protagonists' fascination.

Gatsby and *Vertigo*, this thesis will argue, keep coming back precisely because of the unique structure by which they ensnare readers in fascination. My paper will examine Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* along with Baz Luhrmann's forthcoming film adaptation and Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, recently named BFI's Greatest Film of All Time, and the ways in which they probe Americans' inescapable, and doomed attempt to construct personal identity through

nostalgic visions of the past. This study explores *Gatsby*'s and *Vertigo*'s profound thematic and formal connections with film noir and its engagement with early twentieth century crises of identity; both texts share with the noir genre a paradoxical fear of and desire for the past. Both also share noir's capacity to inspire fascination in critical and noncritical audiences alike. My thesis probes these latest vogues of *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* as instances of America's durable fascination with noir narratives; I focus on the ways that the texts' narrative and formal properties inspire nostalgic confusion between ideal and reality that marks subsequent adaptations, critical writing, and audience responses.

Part one of this paper provides a brief history of noir and its direct source material, the hard-boiled crime novel, and will highlight productive overlaps between noir and *Gatsby*'s and *Vertigo*'s formal and narrative elements. Part two will discuss both texts' engagement in one of noir's central concerns, the simultaneous fear of and desire for the past, found in the typical noir reintegration narrative. In *Gatsby* and *Vertigo*, this paradox manifests itself in Gatsby's, Nick's, and Scottie's attempts to stabilize their own ontological anxieties through an ideal other who represents to them a desired American identity. All three idealizations are crushed by confrontation with the criminality of the real person they have idealized, yet ultimately all three characters choose to continue identifying with their ideal object, long after such identification makes any logical sense. These idealizations mirror each character's evolving perception of American identity in their particular historical moment, and their sense of belonging to an American community. Part three relates these characters' reification of the tarnished ideal to critical fascination with these texts. Noir criticism has long discussed film noir as a "fascinating" genre full of characters who are fascinated by their desirable femme fatales; however, such criticism has often ignored the ways in which its own studies of these texts replicate their

protagonists' uncritical fascination. This phenomena, as I will show, finds a contemporary analogue in critical praise of the TV show *Mad Men*. Past and present adaptations of *The Great Gatsby* tend to fall prey to similar idealization of their ideal object—the text of *Gatsby* itself—by attempting to create a "definitive version." I will discuss how the recent stage play *Gatz* mostly manages to avoid this trap by avoiding characterization as an adaptation, and how Luhrmann's *Gatsby* seems likely to display the same fascination as its film predecessors and its obsessive protagonists. In a similar way, *Vertigo* criticism's investment in Judy as the "real" woman of the film and an absolute victim seems to reify Scottie's obsession even as it attempts to expose it. *Vertigo*-themed tourism also attempts to retrace Scottie's footsteps, transferring critical fascination with the film from theory to reality. Such pilgrimages, I will argue, typify nostalgic longing for an imaginary ideal that blurs the distinction between reality and fiction. Part four uses Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* to approach questions of what nostalgic return might mean to Americans today, and how nostalgic readings of *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* ignore their own warning about the dangers of idealizing the past and others.

"The Seamy Side of Things": Film Noir and the Hardboiled Crime Novel

The term "film noir" originally described a series of wartime Hollywood films made from 1941 to 1944 (Faison 4) The release of these films was delayed until after the war in France, when French critics, seeing the films all at once, noticed similar narrative, stylistic and thematic departures from prewar films (Krutnik 15).[1] While the exact formula for what makes a noir text has always been in contention, in general, many noir films share several important elements. According to Ed Sikhov, it is these films' "emotional goal" that makes them distinct; noir films are "feel-bad movies" that exist in "an ugly world—a paranoid world. Urban and dirty. Full of greed, lust, and corruption. In short, the film noir explores the dark side of American culture" (Sikhov 151). Stephen Faison also suggests distinguishing narrative devices such as "first person voiceovers, flashback reports, nonlinear scene sequences, convoluted plots, and unresolved endings," as well as key stylistic features like "oblique camera perspectives, deep-focus

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1 The five original films noir were *The Maltese Falcon*, released in 1941, and *Murder, My Sweet*, *Double Indemnity*, *Laura*, and *The Woman in the Window* in 1944. It is important to note that these films were not consciously made to be a series. French critics recognized clear patterns of repetition and variation that had escaped the critical notice of American viewers during their original U.S. release (Krutnik 15). The first book-length study of the genre, published by Raymonde Borde and Etienne Chaumeton in 1955, was not followed by similar British or American film criticism on the subject until the late 1960s and early 1970s (Krutnik 16). It is perhaps because the genre emerged post-release from intuitive grouping rather than an intentional artistic similarity, the terms for classifying what makes a film "noir" have, to some extent, continued to be self-determined on the part of the critic, and therefore controversial. Some critics, such as Higham and Greenberg (*Hollywood in the Forties* 19) and Paul Kerr ("Out of What Past?" 45), see film noir as a genre. Raymond Durgnat ("Paint it Black" 10-11) and Paul Schrader ("Notes on *Film Noir*" 8) propose noir as a style, defined by a specific "mood" and "tone". Janey Place ("Women in *Film Noir*" 37) and Robert Profirio ("No Way Out" 212-213), among others, view noir as a "movement" (qtd. in Krutnik 17), a historic cycle composed of films created between 1940 and 1959 with the studio sets and artificial lighting popular in their time that lent them their recognizable style (Faison 19). Still others, as Frank Krutnik notes, have still more personal definitions, such as Jon Tuska's assertion that noir is "both a screen style…and a perspective on human existence and society" (qtd. in Kruntik 17).

photography, low-key lighting, and tightly framed compositions," all of which "contribute to [a] shadowy, unstable, and dangerous atmosphere" (19).

Borde's and Chaumenton's initial study cites the hard-boiled crime novel as the "immediate source" of the film noir (Krutnik 33). The goal of the hard-boiled crime novel was to create a departure from the gentlemanly detective fiction of the "English-style", Golden Age mystery writers, such as Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Ellery Queen (Faison 10). The detective of such stories, such as Doyle's Sherlock Holmes or Christie's Hercule Poirot, was often a dandified intellectual who reliably solved each of their baffling cases using primarily the power of observation and deduction. Crime in the prenoir detective story was an "aberration," an "interruption of a stable, just society" (Faison 91). Rather than using refined detectives to confirm the triumph of logic and the human mind, the crime novels of hard-boiled writers like Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and James M. Cain strove to provide a more "realistic" and uniquely American detective story, featuring a private eye hero who "acts as mediator between the criminal underworld and the world of respectable society." (Krutnik 39) This detective/narrator can function in this capacity because he is also morally compromised, tainted by underworld criminality by association. The novels strived to show, as Chandler put it, the "seamy side of things" (989), the hidden stitching of the grand-scale corruptions and petty crimes of the upper-echelons that held together its polished veneer of decency. In the noir world, it is not primarily the criminals but society itself that is "rotten," making traditional moral behavior "foolish" and justice unattainable (Faison 91).

While *The Great Gatsby* and *Vertigo* are not traditional noir texts, I see them as existing at the extreme limits of noir, in its early developmental stages and near the traditional cycle's end, and therefore in an excellent position to comment on how noir began and what it became.

This detective pulp fiction, particularly popular during the 1920s through 1940s, was contemporary with *The Great Gatsby*, and therefore shares many narrative and stylistic elements; perhaps more interesting, though, is its historical position in the transfer of disillusioned narration from Lost Generation writers' upper and middle class "detectives" to the lower class private eyes of the hard-boiled genre. The Lost Generation protagonists are detectives in the sense that their narratives revolve around a central search, whether that is a literal mystery like Nick Carraway's investigation into Gatsby's identity or their quest for purpose and fulfillment. Like their tougher noir counterparts, protagonists such as Jake Barnes of *The Sun Also Rises*, Nick Carraway, or Jay Gatsby himself experience despair and alienation, as well as skepticism of modernity, leaning towards the noir side of a continuum with the privileged anomie of Sherlock Holmes near one end and the gritty cynicism of Philip Marlowe near the other. F. Scott Fitzgerald was very vocal about his perception of the unsettled post-war atmosphere, its "nervous energy stored up and unexpended" (qtd. in Egert 55) and its Lost Generation "grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken" (*This Side of Paradise* 282). In a description of Fitzgerald that might apply equally well to his characters, Lynn Dumenil suggests that "beneath the glamour of his flappers and jazzhounds lay a fragility rooted in their failure to find meaning or purpose amid the uncertainty of modern life" (150 qtd. in Faison 9). Faison calls this existential angst "a rich man's existentialism," borne from lives of luxury haunted by purposelessness in "a world of vanishing illusions" (64). Such narratives were a jumping-off point for voicing similar feelings from the working class perspective of the noir protagonist—a perspective that asserts the disavowal of all such lingering sentimental illusions due to the necessity of a hard life. *Gatsby*, therefore, includes many of the elements that would come to be common and often magnified in the hard-boiled genre including two fairly grisly murders

related, as Charles Egert notes, with hints towards the language of hard-boiled fiction and "lurid newspaper treatment" (64), Gatbsy's underworld dealings as a prohibition-era bootlegger, a plot driven by mystery, and critique of the gap between the meager, desperate lives of the working classes and the corruption and carelessness marking the lives of the wealthy.

Vertigo also does not fall within noir's prime years or appear on the strictest lists of noir canon, yet has an interesting relationship to the genre and a number of productive stylistic and narrative overlaps. Premiering in 1958, near the tail-end of the noir cycle and not featuring the trademark noir black and white cinematography, *Vertigo* is often overlooked on lists of noir films. Many cycle advocates cite Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*, also released in 1958 a few months earlier, as the last "true" film noir.[2] Like many noir films, *Vertigo* is based on a novel within the hard-boiled tradition, Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac's 1954 novel *D'Entre Les Morts*, or "From Among the Dead." *Vertigo* therefore shares many of the narrative conventions of the noir text, including the troubled detective, femme fatale, convoluted plot, and ambiguous ending, as well as foregrounding troubled masculine identity, a pervasive atmosphere of helplessness and predetermination, and focalization around a compromised character.

While the film faithfully follows much of the novel's typical noir plot and seems intent on preserving its atmosphere of romance and horror, its departures from the novel seem to have the most to say about the noir genre. Already past the release of the first books of noir criticism and the release of its most popular films, it would seem likely that *Vertigo*'s situation within certain conventions of similar films, even if they wouldn't be minutely categorized and argued over in American criticism for a few more years, was far from unconscious. As James Naremore

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[2] While *Vertigo* is often left off of the list of "proper" noir films and relegated to neo-noir status specifically because of the aesthetic centrality of black and white to noir, some critics, such Andrew Spicer, consider it a "rare color noir," (xvi).

notes, Hitchcock's films remained on "the margins of film noir" and its concern with its hyper-masculine protagonists by "[a]gain and again...invit[ing] his audience to identify with the point of view of women...a product of his personal inclination or his commercial calculations" (272). Ina Rae Hark cites his "contract with Selznick, the initial success with the 'female gothic' *Rebecca*, and the shortage of dynamic male stars because of the war" as "all the excuses Hitchcock needed to continue to film his female-propelled narrative as he worked out a type of American masculinity" (291). *Vertigo* might not initially feature on many lists of such female-centric films; after all, the film is one of the most notable examples of audience identification through point-of-view shooting in Classical Hollywood cinema. The camera's near-constant association with Scottie, the film's detective protagonist, depicts much of the film through his experience with frequent point-of-view shots and shot/reverse shot patterns as the audience watches Scottie watching Madeleine. Philip Novak points to mise-en-scene, editing, and scoring that add to the audience's experience of Scottie's visual and emotional perspective: "When Scottie first embraces Madeleine as they stand on the beach, for example, the waves crashing as they kiss and the welling, melodramatic score render his sense of the moment" (274).

While *Vertigo* follows the story of *D'Entre Les Morts* fairly closely, it deviates from the novel's arrangement of plot details in ways that complicate the pattern of identification established in most of the film. While the novel chooses to reveal the femme fatale's deception at its close, *Vertigo's* script chooses to reveal the truth of Judy's involvement in Elster's murder plot through a flashback from Judy's perspective with a third of the film still to go. This knowledge causes a division in audience identification as we are forced to reread the events of the first part of the film from her point of view, and recognize Scottie's obsession and brutality from a position outside his romantic lens. When Scottie buys Judy an exact duplicate of

Madeleine's gray suit, we cringe along with her, forced to recognize and share her discomfort and pain made suddenly obvious by our shared knowledge. Robert Corber suggests that this division of audience identification serves as a critique of gender inequality:

> The spectator's continuing identification with Scottie conflicts with her/his identification with Judy and places her/him in a kind of double bind. The spectator cannot identify with Judy's victimization without resenting Scottie's desire to regain Madeleine; nor can s/he identify with Scottie's desire to regain Madeleine without overlooking his victimization of Judy. In this way, the film helps to destabilize the spectator's understanding of social reality, which remains unfixed. (183)

This reading opens the opportunity to read *Vertigo* as a critique or noir's masculine-centered and masculinity-obsessed narratives. *Vertigo* apes noir conventions of narrative point-of-view, then subverts them by, however briefly, giving voice-over to and encouraging identification with a femme fatale—though, notably, not excusing or erasing her criminality. Such a reading suggests the feminist potential of this "unfixed" position of audience identification, revealing similar alternative points of view existing under the dominant patriarchal voice in our own societies.

"Gatsby turned out all right in the end": Fear, Desire, and Reification

The Great Gatsby and *Vertigo* function on the limits of the noir genre chronologically and occasionally thematically, providing both alternate and complementary viewpoints on traditional noir topics such as class and masculine subjectivity. Both texts however, are deeply invested in replicating and foregrounding two of noir's central concerns, a simultaneous nostalgia for and fear of the past, and the accompanying crisis of identity such a contradiction creates. Both narratives feature men who have trouble finding their place in American society, and therefore attempt to realize their desired identity through an ideal other. In this way, both films connect to the familiar post-war reintegration narrative of the classic American film noir. Many films noir

deal with, as Krutnik suggests, "the adjustment of a violently 'war-honed' masculinity to the demands and delimitations of postwar social life" (165). After living in an environment of extreme violence and morality suspended by necessity, returning American soldiers struggled to readapt to civilian society. The process was further complicated because, in the interim, society, especially in regards to gender roles, had moved on without them. During World War II, jobs vacated by men who had left to fight were filled by women, granting them new opportunities for agency not often afforded to them by the conservative patriarchy of the pre-war era.[3] Film noir anti-heroes often desired to return to a now-strange normalcy, yet in some ways longed for the simpler social dynamic of the all-male unit or the clear right and wrong of an 'us versus them' conflict. For these anti-heroes, the femme fatale, an exaggeration of male fears about post-war independent, "mannish" women[4], is often initially viewed as a way back into that society. Through their idealized conception of the object of their desire, many noir men hope to find the normative heterosexual union that will make them fit once again into the old social mold as if by magic.[5] That this woman turns out to be duplicitous and frequently murderous is often a significant contributor to these films' overall sense of the loss of social and ontological equilibrium.

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[3] "Film noir's sociocultural setting is one characterized by extreme gender anxiety, as men coming home from the war wondered what their wives had been doing when they were away and as women were driven back into the domestic sphere to resume function as wives and mothers after a period of independence and new experiences as part of the work force during the war. (Grossman 98)

[4] "Like the cultural preoccupation with the 'femme fatale' figure in film noir, the New Woman functioned as both a symbol of female power and an opportunity for dominant cultural voices to categorize and subordinate threatening calls for female agency." (Grossman, 99)

[5] This reintegration and idealization narrative is a classic noir staple, through a particularly good example is Jeff Markum's attempt at redemption through Kathie in *Out of the Past,* a narrative also fundamentally concerned with being haunted by the past, yet longing to return to a lost time and a lost innocence. See Denise Warren, "*Out of the Past*: Semiotic Configurations of the Femme Fatale in Film Noir."

In line with their respective historical contexts, *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* function similarly as variations on this theme of relation to the present and past, and the attempt to discover identity through another. *The Great Gatsby* deals with its title character's obsession with and idealization of his hometown sweetheart, Daisy. Before the war, Jay Gatsby, born James Gatz to a poor Midwest farming family, falls in love with the wealthy, beautiful, and much-desired Daisy Fay. His attachment to Daisy, even before the war, is somewhat ambiguous; at several points the audience may wonder whether Gatsby in specifically in love with her, her voice that "sounds like money", or her air of leisure and luxury. Gatsby longs to climb the social ladder from his meager beginnings to wealth and greatness. Seeing the social position and proof of success he desires in the conquest of Daisy, Gatsby "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath" and, in doing so, "she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete." (103) Daisy has become, for Gatsby, both the American Dream incarnate and the golden past in which he feels he can achieve that dream. Finally marrying Daisy would be, for Gatsby, like stepping back in time to a point in his life when his final possession of the status he desires seemed assured; it would erase the struggle and years of longing that had followed afterwards instead when Gatsby leaves Daisy to fight in World War I.

After the war, Gatbsy makes money through several decidedly shady projects in order to enter Daisy's social circle and revive their courtship. As much as Gatsby desires to turn back the clock and achieve his desired status, he is also haunted by the means with which he has pursued it. The novel refers to Gatsby's unsavory methods, but also the large-scale consequences of that kind of thinking, as a ghostly "foul dust that floated in the wake of his dreams" (2). While the novel may be most remembered for its grand mansions and wild parties, it also dwells on the seedier sides of New York in the early 1920s, expressing a kind of duality to the city created by

wide income gap between Gatsby's and the Buchanans' sets and the urban poor in the ashy wasteland to which the novel seems to link the "foul dust" of Gatsby's dreams. For Gatsby, nostalgia and his personal idea of success are connected; while the version of Gatsby in the narrative's present is wealthy—possibly wealthy on the level of Daisy Fay's family, whom he idolized in his youth—Gatsby seems to realize that wealth does not equal his, and his society's, very specific criteria for success. American status, partially determined by money, partially determined by family, also includes an ineffable quality facilitated by both money and family that Gatsby hopes to regain from Daisy—a sense of belonging to that status. The only way to achieve membership into the elite seems to be being a part of it. Through marriage to the young Daisy, Gatsby initially hoped to marry into status, to possess it by possessing Daisy and the quality of eliteness that is so connected to her essential being that "money" seems to come out in the tone of her voice when she speaks.

The creation of this elite state of belonging necessitates its opposites and outsiders. In contrast to the weightless white ennui of the Buchanan's mansion—with its "windows ajar gleaming white against the fresh grass," (6) its "pale flag" curtains (7), and its occupants both wearing white dresses, seeming to rest upon couches "as though upon an anchored balloon" (7)—or the vital, boisterous color of Gatsby's pink suits and yellow car, the valley of ashes just outside of the city with its "gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it" (21) is characterized by colorlessness and the slow, perpetual movement of "gray cars," barges, and the "leaden spades" of a "swarm" of "ash-gray men"[6] (21). All of this is watched over by a

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[6] The residents of the valley, obviously separated from East and West Egg residents by location and occupation, are racialized in a way—if the occupants of the "white palaces of fashionable East Egg" (5) are as white as their houses, the occupants of the valley of ashes equally take on the attributes of their environment, becoming the "ash gray" of the city's pollution that itself

faded billboard for Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, a long-defunct oculist, the enormous, printed eyes of which loom like a blind god over "the solemn dumping ground," observing the same scenes of poverty that the wealthy citizens of West and East Egg must drive through in order to enter the city, but choose every time to ignore (21). Tom Quirk notes the "divided quality" of Gatsby's world and Fitzgerald's descriptions, not only the elite and the working class, old and new money, the real and the ideal, or T. J. Eckleburg's blind eyes, but also the nature of the city itself, "rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish" (Quirk 590). The "foul dust" that follows Gatsby's dream of status and belonging, therefore, is the aftermath of such a social division, both its human cost and the foundational instability it creates. When the poor are excluded and the less than ideal terms of their existence are ignored, the social infrastructure may implode. This fall gets played out in miniature at the end of the novel when Wilson murders Gatsby and kills himself. Tom Buchanan ignores Wilson almost entirely during his affair with Wilson's wife, Myrtle. After Myrtle is killed and Wilson discovers her affair, Tom blames Gatsby on both charges and Wilson takes his revenge. The novel suggests big-picture parallels of

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becomes a sort of class and racial marker. The identification of the valley's working men as a "swarm" also hints at an othered identity, mirroring the descriptions of natives in Fitzgerald contemporary Joseph Conrad's colonial novels, such as *Heart of Darkness*: "I made out, deep in the tangled gloom, naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes-- the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening. of bronze colour" (63). Such a description also engages in grouping rather than individualizing its subjects; while Fitzgerald paints his perpetually moving horde the same color as their environment so that they blend into the landscape, Conrad fragments his subjects into a collection of "human limbs in movement," indeterminately connected or separated from each other or "the bush" itself. *The Great Gatsby* is intensely involved with issues of race, class, and the fear of white elitists like Tom Buchanan with his inherited ideas of "Nordic" superiority and fear that his racially homogenous world will be polluted by immigrants rising in the ranks. Critical discourse often marks Gatsby as a racialized figure who hides his past while attempting to "pass" as an "Oxford man," one of the elite. While such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, see Meredith Goldsmith's "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in the Great Gatsby" *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.3 (2003): 443-68 or Carlyle Van Thompson's *The Tragic Black Buck: Racial Masqueradin in the American Literary Imagination*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.

this melodrama to the instability of American industry and the stratified society that Gatsby's nostalgic dream relies upon and perpetuates to validate his success. The country's social and economic infrastructure are built on divisions and contradictions, on "sugar lumps," "a wish," and the labor of the anonymous gray masses.

While Gatsby's idealization of Daisy works by erasing her present and substituting a nostalgic ideal, Nick's idealization of Gatbsy functions by reading an ideal persona into Gatsby's fundamental emptiness. As a character, Gatsby is a bit of an absent center: lack of knowledge about him is the central void around which the narrative turns. This absence, I would argue along with Peter Mallios, also creates a productive screen upon which other characters can project identities, both his and their own:

> Such characters may usefully be considered absent...because they are ultimately posited by their novels as only empty, hollow projective tableaux, vague surfaces and phantasmal mirrors in which others see idealized reflections of themselves, and through whose fictive mediation those others are able fantasize themselves in collective social relation. (357)

The "Jay Gatsby" identity was adopted by James Gatz in order to fit into the kind of future he wanted for himself; as Nick concludes, "Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his platonic conception of himself" (90). Consequently, Gatsby as a person doesn't seem to have much depth or substance, but exists as an amalgamation of all of the things that signified wealth and success to the seventeen-year-old Gatz. Even within the world of the story, as Arnold Weinstein observes, Gatsby has a certain narrative quality to him, he "builds himself out of blocks of words," (38) both written media—Nick notes that talking to Gatsby is "like skimming through a dozen magazines" —and cultural ideologies of what success should look, act, and sound like (*Gatsby* 61). Affectations like Gatsby's stilted "old sport" suggest the performance of someone else's identity, the "Oxford man" Gatsby so desires to be.

This absent core to Gatbsy's character, while frustrating to Nick as he tries to figure Gatsby out, ultimately leads to his ability to rewrite Gatsby as Nick's best self. Throughout the novel, the reader witnesses Nick building a picture of the "real" Gatsby in his mind from the pieces of information he is able to find out about his past and present motivations in a similar way to Gatsby's own self-construction. Characters in the novel offer speculations about Gatsby's "true" identity that add to the growing mythology surrounding his blank past—he is alternately "a German spy during the war," "a nephew or cousin of Kaiser Wilhem's," or someone who once "killed a man" (40). Often the language of Nick's narration makes this "building" process explicit, such as when Nick notes that, through his continued association with Gatsby, "the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man" (97). Nick suggests that Gatsby tends to inspire "romantic speculation" in others but doesn't seem to perceive the ways in which he contributes to the romance of the mysterious Gatsby himself (116). Not only is Nick "building" and "filling in" the "Jay Gatsby" identity, but similarly to the ways in which Gatsby idealizes Daisy and makes her into the manifestation of his successful self, Nick admires Gatsby's "extraordinary gift for hope" and attempts to recreate his own identity and conception of what it means to be American through his platonic conception of Gatsby.

As a figure whose internal life, like his past, is a complete mystery, Gatsby's essential blankness and emptiness allows others, like Nick, to project on him what they would like to see in him, and in themselves. Gatsby's smile, with its "sense of eternal reassurance" provides just such a mirror:

> He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles... [that] faced—or seemed to face—the whole eternal world for an instant, and then it concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hope to convey. (44-45)

Observing Gatsby's smile, Nick experiences an intuitive flash of this universal and universalizing potential when recognizing that it "faced—or seemed to face—the whole eternal world," yet rejects this wide expanse for something more personal. Instead, the smile becomes simultaneously a reflection of the viewer's ideal self and of that self's connection to the "whole eternal world." Thus, as Mallios suggests, the "idealized mirror" of Gatsby's smile provides "social opportunities for collective mediation and combination" (372). Far from being cosmically knowing, the magic of Gatsby's smile is that it is blank and pleasant, but entirely empty. The effect mirrors the results of Lev Kuleshov's famous experiment in film and audience perception; Kuleshov filmed Russian actor Ivan Mozhukin in close up with a "sincere-looking," but neutral expression, then cut this film with shots of a bowl of soup, a coffin, and a girl playing. Test audiences discussed the emotional range of the actor, who could portray such intense hunger, grief, and joy. Kuleshov concluded that the audience projected their own feelings about and associations with such images onto the blank canvas of the actor's neutrality (Sikhov 61) The implication for Gatsby's smile is its universal identity and community constructing potential; anyone could draw on its reflective qualities to see themselves as "idealized, privileged, connected" (Mallios 372).

Seeing in Gatsby not only a figure of romance but a hero who allows him to believe in himself, Nick attempts to stabilize his own uncertain identity by idealizing Gatsby's. Nick floats through most of the narrative as an unrooted, divided character—not entirely at home in his "middle-West" birthplace or in the East, bouncing from one empty romantic entanglement to another, a man with an old and wealthy family living in a tiny bungalow, one who tells us in the first pages of his exceptional ability to "reserve judgment" about others as proof of narratorial credibility, then proceeds for the rest of the novel to frequently provide judgments about who he

expects and wants others to be.[7] What seems most uncertain to him is national identity and how he fits into a changing world. Nick originally decides to go to New York after coming back from his military service: "I enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe" (3). Unsettled and looking for a sense of release and finality that the ending of the war did not provide, Nick returns home to find that the feeling of home is gone. Nick is not so much wandering as it seems to him that his "home," his central place of belonging, is wandering. Nick's age, in conjunction with his return from war, also contributes to this sense of abandonment: "Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know..." (126). Nick sees the world moving around him, his prewar community of young, like-minded male friends receding daily as they transition into society through domesticity while he seems to run in place. Nick follows this longing for home and community to New York. While ostensibly in pursuit of the usual American Dream of a young man looking to make good, Nick's restlessness seems aimed towards the pursuit of a particular kind of America, a community in which he can feel connected. Feeling alone and displaced in a rapidly changing world, Nick jumps at the opportunity to see himself reflected in someone else[8]. Mallios identifies a

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[7] Paul Levitt notes several moments when Nick's narration becomes semi-omniscient, delving into Gatsby's thoughts and perceptions. Levitt accounts for these moments as "the problem that Fitzgerald encountered with the witness point of view and its limited avenue of information" (300). I would suggest, instead, that episodes of Nick's "mind reading" again reflect his inability to remain objective. Nick has not become omniscient—he imagines what Gatsby might be thinking, and assumes that he has guessed correctly because his idealized Gatsby would think such things. Since the line between the "real" Gatsby and the ideal Gatsby is already blurred for Nick, such a blur of fact and fiction demonstrates the depth of Nick's emotional investment in "his" Gatbsy.

[8] Some critics suggest that Nick's desire for union and wholeness through Gatsby, like Gatsby's desire for the same through Daisy, is erotic. Edward Wasiolek sites the potential for Nick's unstated homosexuality as a part of his character's overall sense of ambiguity,

narcissistic inclination in Nick's identification with and idealization of Gatsby, but also the attempt to create a new site for belonging: "Narcissisim, of course, is generally identified as a psychopathology predicated...on a refused acknowledgement of difference: one looks in the mirror, at the mother, or upon the world and sees only an extension of oneself—a dyadic family of one" (383). Nick sees in his idealized vision of Gatsby a glint of a sense of "home", of belonging to a connected, collective compatibleness that he uses to stabilize his uncertain position in relation to his own Americanness. The community he sees in Gatsby is particularly appealing because this community represents "an extension of himself," a version of national belonging that rewrites society as his own reflection.

As Gatbsy projects his ideal self onto Daisy, and Nick projects his ideal self onto Gatbsy, so Scottie idealizes Madeleine and Judy as the 'other half' that will allow him to become a social insider. While Gatsby's struggle for his desired social position and self-conception is defined by rising above economics and class, Scottie's attempts are characterized by his desire to achieve a culturally permissible masculine identity. As Krutnik notes, many noir stories "reveal an obsession with male figures who are both internally divided and alienated from the culturally permissible (or ideal) parameters of masculine identity, desire and achievement." (xiii) Such fringe characters are particularly problematic in "classic" noir, as Michael Davidson notes, but also in *Vertigo* since both "emerged during a period of Cold War consensus when the maintenance of normalcy and the nation's health coincided with geopolitical imperatives" (58). Scottie fits within the parameters of such a transgressive noir hero and his "shadowy relationship to the dominant culture" outlined by Davidson in that "although he is usually described as prey

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while Maggie Gordon Froehlich traces the queer relations in the novel between love and money.

to a femme fatale, his nondomestic status and bachelorhood mark him as a sexually indeterminate figure" (58). For Scottie, it all begins with his failure to save a fellow policeman from falling to his death because of his vertigo, and his subsequent resignation from the force. This "failed performance of the law," as Tania Modelski suggests, leaves Scottie scrambling to reassert masculine efficacy for the rest of the film (4). While *Vertigo* repeatedly associates masculinity with "power and freedom," it instead associates Scottie's unemployment and his injury—both his physical injury and the psychological "injury" of his vertigo—with femininity and a lack of freedom and mobility. The film foregrounds Scottie's "feminization" by placing him, still recovering from the accident, in a medically mandated corset. Scottie tells his college friend, Midge, wincing as he does at the binding of the corset, that once it comes off, he'll be a "free man." Scottie's motivation here seems to be twofold: the recognition that he is not, at present, free, but also the fear that he is not "a man."

Failing to uphold the law, giving up his job, and being confined through disability, Scottie becomes anxious about his own sexuality and his increasingly outsider relation to his society.[9] Robert Corbet suggests that the Freudian and psychoanalytic models of male

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[9] Amy Lawrence notes the appropriateness of the casting of James Stewart for a character like Scottie: "It is Stewart who serves as Hitchcock's icon of American manhood...Hitchcock highlights one of the recurrent themes of Stewart's star image: the exploration of an American masculine subjectivity threatened at all times by a frequently undefined but inescapable sense of shame." (56) Stewart's reputation as a household name associated with "homely, middle-class integrity and moral earnestness" makes a striking contrast as Stewart plays against type in *Vertigo*, but his "every-man" status also serves to cement viewer identification with Scottie in addition to the use of point-of-view shots. (58) Likewise, Stewart's slight build, soft voice, and "fine hands" (a trait often highlighted in close-up by his directors) are not traditionally masculine, and lend credence to Scottie's anxieties that he might be perceived as feminine, or somehow gender deviant.

development popular in the 1950s,[10] would "diagnose" Scottie's fear and desire to relinquish his duties as an officer of the law as developmentally regressive and likely homosexual in origin (Corbet 173). Such a diagnosis employs the Freudian Oedipal model of male development, in which a young male child, identified with his mother throughout his early childhood, must reject the mother and identify with and submit to the patriarchal economy of signifying, the "law of the Father." A person aberrant from this developmental model at some point refuses connection to the "law of the Father," regressing to identification with the "mother," generally supposed to be an indicator of taking on the feminine, and homosexuality (Krutnik 80). It is at this point of self-questioning and anxiety that Scottie meets an old college friend, Gavin Elster, who convinces Scottie to follow his wife, Madeleine. Madeleine, Elster believes, has been possessed by the vengeful and suicidal ghost of her ancestor, Carlotta Valdes, a Californian Hispanic dancer who was abandoned by the Anglo lover who also took her child during San Francisco's Bohemian days.

While working with Madeleine to avoid a tragic fate, Scottie falls in love with her. Again, like Gatsby, it is unclear whether Scottie falls in love with the woman herself or with what she represents to him. Madeleine, like Gatsby, is the absent center around which the film's mystery constellates. She seems to have no history beyond the first time Scottie sees her. Scottie and the audience are told that before Madeleine's episodes of memory loss and strange behavior, which lead Elster to suspect possession, Madeleine was normal and happy with a healthy marriage. The

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[10] It is likely Scottie would have been aware of such a diagnosis. Freudian psychoanalysis was first becoming popular in American culture after World War I in the diagnosis and treatment of "war neuroses." Psychoanalytic terms and practices became fairly well known in popular culture over time and figured largely in genres like noir and hard-boiled fiction, which, with its war-traumatized protagonists, was often heavily psychological. (Krutnik 45) Hitchcock seemed to embrace psychoanalysis, directing many overtly psychological thrillers, such as *Spellbound*, that dealt explicitly with themes of madness and often, as in *The Birds*, *Psycho*, and even in *Vertigo* through the literally possessive Carlotta, with overly attached mothers or mother-figures.

film never shows the audience this Madeleine. Instead, the Madeleine Scottie sees is ghostly, wearing almost solely neutrals that, combined actress Kim Novak's pale skin and platinum blonde hair, drain her of all color on camera. She rarely speaks above an aristocratically accented, low whisper, rarely betrays any emotion through facial expression, and is prone to silence and long, blank stares. While Novak's acting is often critiqued as wooden[11], as Hitchcock explained to Peter Bogdanovich, he specifically directed Novak to keep her facial expression as neutral as possible in order to create a Kuleshov-like blank, reflective surface:

> As I tried to explain to that girl, Kim Novak, 'You have got a lot of expression in your face. Don't want any of it...Let me explain to you. If you put a lot of redundant expressions on your face, it's like taking a piece of paper and scribbling all over it...You want to write a sentence for somebody to read. They can't read it—too much scribble on the face. Much easier to read if the paper is blank. (Brody)

Scottie seems to do just this, projecting his own salvation onto saving Madeleine. Not only does saving the ghostly, ethereal Madeleine allow Scottie a way back into detective work, the possibility of individual power, and a Golden Age-style comfort in the capacities of the human mind, it also offers the potential to enter a normative heterosexual relationship and once again re-enter conformist 1950s American society as an insider.[12]

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[11] See Roger Ebert's 1996 "Vertigo" review for a rebuttal: "And Novak, criticized at the time for playing the character too stiffly, has made the correct acting choices: Ask yourself how you would move and speak if you were in unbearable pain, and then look at Judy."

[12] The "normative" properties of a union between Madeleine and Scottie are complicated somewhat by Scottie's belief that Madeleine is Gavin Elster's wife; an affair with Madeleine, therefore, would mean breaking one social rule in order to conform to another that is of greater personal importance (or is perhaps perceived as of more social importance. It is his masculinity with which Scottie is concerned, and with which he equates social belonging. The dominance and sexual prowess involved in "stealing" another man's woman are quintessentially masculine behaviors of a certain kind.) It is also true that, while Scottie is aware of Madeleine's marriage, like Gatsby's awareness of Daisy's marriage, it doesn't seem to entirely register for him. After it becomes clear to the audience that Scottie is in love with Madeleine—and when audience identification with Scottie is at its romantic height—Elster disappears from the story entirely.

Scottie experiences a psychotic break when, because of his vertigo, he is unable to save Madeleine from what is apparently a suicide—losing both his ticket to normalcy and once again indirectly causing the death of another through a failed performance of masculinity; he not only succumbs to a physical and psychological "weakness," but also, notably, fails to climb to the top of a phallic tower. After recovering enough to exit a mental health facility, Scottie revisits the places he and Madeleine visited in their own wanderings. His identification with Madeleine seems stronger than ever. He is "possessed" by the memory of her, wandering the streets like the "mad Carlotta", mistaking women for Madeleine (Modelski 96). Scottie finds another woman, a shop girl named Judy Barton, who physically resembles Madeleine, and proceeds to buy her the clothes, makeup, and hairstyle that will make her look exactly like his dead love. Unlike Madeleine, Judy is not a blank slate, seeming to represent instead Madeleine's exact opposite, a sincere lack of mystery. Judy gives her back story immediately, "Do you want to see my driver's license? [...] My name is Judy Barton, I come from Salina, Kansas. I work at Magnin's and I live here," and volunteers information about her family, lingering over a picture of her younger self and her mother, while passing quickly over a photograph of a step-father "I didn't like [...] much" in a separate frame.[13] Judy is not colorless, whispering, or helpless. Immediately physically distinctive with a contemporary rather than classic hairstyle, a clinging green dress clearly less mysterious about the shape of the woman underneath than Madeleine's billowing layers, and exaggerated, more explicitly sexy makeup, Judy is also forceful and direct where

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Scottie works directly with Madeleine on his repressed memory theory, seeming to forget his original client. For Scottie, like Gatsby, his object of desire doesn't always register as an individual woman who can be married or unmarried. She's a symbol, and as such he may forget inconvenient facts for the purposes of his single-minded vision to pursue social legitimacy, even in a manner that is obviously flawed from an outside perspective.

[13] Notably, Judy is here figured as identifying with the "mother" and separation from the "father".

Madeleine was submissive and circuitous. Despite her refusal, Scottie attempts to force Judy into the same mold by suppressing her physical differences from Madeleine. Corber suggests the root of this behavior "is not so much that he wants to regain Madeleine as that he wants to reclaim his masculinity." (181) Even after her death, Scottie is still trying to see his ideal self reflected in an idealized Madeleine, not necessarily *the* Madeleine, just any mirror image of Madeleine that can fool him into believing that he has once again achieved a socially acceptable masculine identity.

Both *The Great Gatbsy* and *Vertigo* are famous for their tragic and unsatisfying endings, features which overlap noir's investment in the unreachable, unachievable, and the unknowable. John Belton notes the frequency of "nihilistic resolutions" in many films noir: "It does not conclude with the triumph of the heroic detective and the forces of reason . . . It ends instead with a sense of bewilderment, alienation, and despair; with an assertion that individual action is either unable to effect change or counter-productive" (qtd. in Novak). While the endings of both texts are identified as some of the biggest downers in American cinema and literature, *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* in fact seem to choose the ending that, while dependent in some part of the self-delusion of the main characters, spares them complete devastation and disillusionment—they keep moving. After their idealizations have been built, each text confronts the protagonist with his ideal's fundamental flaw and the paradox of their own idealization. I would argue that the texts themselves shatter the flawed ideal and leave the validity of a communal, whole, "great" American identity pointedly in question, but all three characters manage to keep their faith in the idealized other, and the national belonging they represent, even after such faith is clearly unfounded.

The inevitable doom of Gatsby's idealized conception of Daisy reaches critical mass at the end of the novel. Not only is it impossible for Gatbsy to return to an ideal time before the war

at the peak of his youth and promise, but it is impossible for Daisy to embody Gatbsy's own fantasy of his successful, triumphant self. Iterations of Gatbsy's now-famous affirmation, that "of course you can" repeat the past often leave out the all-important beginning of Nick's warning. Before Nick cautions Gatbsy "you can't repeat the past," he first warns: "I wouldn't ask too much of her." (102) In *The Great Gatsby*, the idealized vision of the dream is frequently more satisfying than its physical presence. Henry Gatz, Gatsby's father, proudly shows Nick a picture of Gatsby's mansion that is "cracked in the corners and dirty with many hands"; although both Nick and Henry are standing inside that exact same mansion at the time, Henry continues to point out details in the photo, seeking Nick's "admiration" (159). Nick understands that, "[h]e had shown it so often that I think it was more real to him now than the house itself" (160). Likewise, the real Daisy could never compete with the green light at the end of her dock, a symbolic manifestation of his memories of Daisy that, like Henry Gatz's photograph, have been pulled up and recounted so many times that they hardly resemble their original source—the referent has become the object. After a traumatic car accident, Daisy leaves Gatsby for the stability of her boorish but predictable husband, Tom. Devastated yet unable to let go of his investment in Daisy and hope of her return, Gatsby is finally murdered in a case of mistaken identity, still waiting for her phone call. Arnold Weinstein suggests that Gatsby is aware that the flesh-and-blood Daisy "is incommensurate with the Dream" he has created from that past, but even when confronted with solid proof, he continues to "remake the world, the past, to fashion a reality of his own that would correspond to the dream" (25).

The version of 1920s American privilege that she represents for Gatsby turns out to be flawed as well. The novel suggests that the Buchanans are "careless people—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness" (166).

Daisy's cowardice in not coming forward as the driver who hit and killed Myrtle and Tom's selfishness in implicating Gatsby to her unstable husband lead to Gatsby's and Wilson's deaths. While Daisy may embody the strong feeling of belonging associated with the elite, she also represents elitism's disregard for anyone outside the proscribed circle. Wealth throughout the novel is demonstrated to be a transformative, but corrupting force, affecting the rich and poor alike that live under its influence. Daisy lets Nick in on a "family secret...about the butler's nose" at their first meeting, that the butler used to be a silver polisher, but long exposure to the corrosive chemicals destroyed his sinuses (13). Ultimately, *Gatsby*'s version of the 1920s is a little like the car crash at Gatsby's house, the first in the novel. One of Gatsby's drunk partygoers, whom Nick calls "Owl Eyes," runs his car into a ditch, detaching a wheel, yet cannot seem to understand that the wheel is gone:

> 'Wha's matter?' he inquired calmly. 'Did we run out of gas?'
> 'Look!'
> Half a dozen fingers pointed at the amputated wheel—he stared at it for a moment, then looked upward as though he suspected that it had dropped from the sky. [...] 'Wonder'ff tell me whether there's a gas'line station?' [...]
> 'But the *wheel's* off!'
> He hesitated.
> 'No harm in trying.' (51-2)

America, with its corrupt rich and desperate poor, is a wrecked car with the wheel off, yet no one can seem to decide or accept how it happened or figure out what to do next. And yet, Gatsby continues to believe in both the merit of striving for the Buchanans' definition of success and in Daisy herself.

Similarly, Nick refuses to give up on his platonic conception of Gatsby, even when all evidence points to the contrary. When Gatsby's criminality is revealed, Nick is initially disgusted—this is not the romantic, eternally hopeful Gatbsy that he wanted, that he created for himself. The reality of Gatsby's transgressions nearly causes Nick to give up on people entirely.

Still, when Gatsby shows his essential honor and willingness to continue sacrificing everything for Daisy up until his death, Nick finds a way to continue seeing the best of himself and America in Gatsby. As Barbara Will suggests, Gatsby's hope for a better future becomes synonymous with American optimism and resilience at the end of the novel, as Gatsby's fate "takes on mythic dimensions, becoming an allegory for the course of the American nation and the struggles and dreams of its citizens" (126). As Will points out, in the book's final paragraph, Gatsby *becomes* the American consciousness: "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—...So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (*Gatsby* 141). The seamless slip of Gatsby into "us", and his life, his concerns, his dreams into ours suggests the fusion of the course of Gatsby's life and the American present and future. Nick's personal ambivalence about his national belonging is also satisfied. Home becomes for Nick his childhood home in the Middle West: "That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth...I am a part of that" (163). Like Gatsby, Nick retreats from a tense and troubling modernity into his past to find the final definition of wholeness and belonging—back to the comfort and simplicity he remembers as a child in the mid-west, but also back to his idealized conception of Gatsby and the myth of wholeness.

That Nick decides Gatsby has "turned out all right in the end" (141) becomes essential to "The Great Gatsby's" idea of Americanness. Gatsby's "extraordinary gift for hope," his unwavering belief in his ability to create the version of himself he desires, becomes a national trait. Gatsby is the ultimate self-made man, made primarily of words, but only the ones of his own choosing, whether true or not. The novel recreates Gatsby as our "glorified" self, and therefore has to do some tactful forgetting and erasing of the work the novel has done previously

to point out his immoral behavior—Gatsby is, after all, a corrupt, adulterous bootlegger (Will 126). On his last stop at Gatsby's house before leaving for the mid-west, Nick notices "an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick" on "the white steps," which Nick scrapes off with his shoe (167). The revelation of Gatsby's criminality must, like the "obscene word," be erased from sight and memory in order to sustain Gatsby's status as a figure of transcendent and collective national identity. Neither Gatsby and his "white steps," nor the "white palaces" of the rich and careless like the Buchanans are without their own criminality and "obscenity," yet the choice to reaffirm the essential goodness of pursuing such a definition of success, and such a definition of Americanness, is a choice to overlook such "foul dust," even if it means remaining willfully trapped within it.

Vertigo enacts a similar reifying move. It is soon revealed that Judy was, in fact, hired by Gavin Elster to play the part of his wife Madeleine in the staging of an elaborate false suicide to cover up his murder of the real Madeleine Elster. Furious, Scottie drags Judy up the church tower where she pretended to jump to her death as the false Madeleine. Scottie finally defeats his vertigo and is able to climb all the way to the top, where he reveals his knowledge of the whole plot. Even in this moment of the triumph of Scottie's reason over criminality, the toll of Scottie's obsession and idealization is clear, tainting his victory. Scottie continues to be unable to distinguish between the fictional Madeleine and the real Judy, even after learning of her deception. "You were the counterfeit, you were the copy," Scottie accuses Judy, softening in defeat to admit, "I loved you so, Madeleine." In film's final twist, frightened by the sudden appearance of a nun, Judy falls off of the tower, and Scottie loses Madeleine for the second time. The film ends with Scottie standing on the ledge of the tower, looking down on Judy's body with an unreadable expression. His body weight is forward, arms are slightly extended away from his

body, with his elbows at forty-five degree angles and his hands hanging limply from his wrists. This is the same posture in which we see Scottie during the dream/psychotic break sequence, when he mentally substitutes himself in Madeleine's place, falling from the tower in silhouette. The return of this posture at the end of the film suggests Scottie's continued identification with Madeleine/Judy, even after the death of the ideal.

The revelation of Elster's deception suggests that the American conformist culture itself may be a lie perpetuated to sustain a paradoxical white heterosexual male "power and freedom." The process of "becoming a man" through suppression of the feminine ironically results in the loss of the female against which the masculine defines its identity. In *Vertigo,* this self-annihilation takes several forms, but is foregrounded in the film's opening by discussions of Scottie's corset and the "design" of femininity. When Scottie remarks at the unusual design of a new brassiere Midge is sketching, she tells him "an aircraft engineer up the peninsula designed it in his spare time" on "the principle of the cantilever bridge." Such a comment points to the structural support femininity lends to a binary social construction of gender and to maleness, and also, as Modelski suggests, that femininity is a male construction, supported by external trappings and without central truth: "This is an idea that the film will subsequently evoke with horror. For if woman, who is posited as she whom man must know and possess in order to guarantee his truth and his identity, does not exist, then in some important sense he does not exist either, but rather is faced with the possibility of his own nothingness..." (91). Garry Leonard articulates the Lacaninan position of gender as a social construct, in which the "masquerade" of the feminine confirms masculinity: "The woman who best represents the feminine to a given masculine subject will be loved...she will become a symptom for the man that will serve to ward

off the subversive and fragmentary nature of his unconscious, and protect him from any painful awareness that the mastery of consciousness he presumes he has is a mythical construct" (272).

Thus Madeleine and Judy, or at least Scottie's idealized version of them, serve to shore up his anxieties about his masculinity with their feminine "otherness." Paradoxically, because part of masculine identity includes the need to dominate and "tame" the feminine, Scottie's attempts to control these women--Madeleine by attempting to keep her from exercising what seems to be a suicidal will, then Judy by "designing" her femininity to fit his own specifications of the ideal woman—lead to the deaths of both women. Scottie attempts to bring Madeleine's supernatural, feminine fluidness into line with his masculine reason during his own process of attempting to analyze and "cure" Madeleine's delusion of possession. Scottie is not willing to accept any explanation besides a scientific and psychological one for Madeleine's behavior; as Corber points out, when Elster first tells Scottie he thinks that his wife is possessed, Scottie's reaction is that he should take her to "the nearest psychiatrist, or psychologist, or neurologist, or psychoanalyst, or maybe the just plain family doctor. And I'd have him check on you, too!" Scottie instead chooses to believe Madeleine's delusion comes from a memory she has repressed, and takes her to the mission at San Juan Bautista to make her relive and recover that memory, which ultimately leads to her death (Corber 181). Modelski notes that this tragic outcome was inscribed from the very beginning by the paradox of masculinity, "the very logic of representation inherent in the therapeutic project. The woman will die. The vey effort to cure her, which is an effort to get her to mirror man and his desire, to see (his) reason, destroys woman's otherness" and thus destroys the man's reason to exist (95).

While the overarching cultural myth of 1950s gender roles suggests that entrance and acceptance into this culture is gained through normative heterosexual union and lawfulness, that

foundation of domesticity is also broken. The only model of a marriage in the film, and one that appears to be the best American 1950s conformist society can offer in terms of wealth, leisure, and privilege, turns out to be murderously dysfunctional. Yet Scottie's yearning to identify with Judy/Madeleine persists long after it makes any logical sense. Even when his object is dead, Scottie reaches out towards his conception of the ideal American identity. Gatsby, Nick, and Scottie realize that the ideal, the gateway into the past or to a perfected version of the self, is unreachable; yet the somehow "great" desire to reach out, all the same, remains. In this way, both texts simultaneously denounce uncomplicated championing of the American Dream or inclusion in the American identity, but also participate in the reifying of myths of the innate goodness and "rightness" of being American. Gatsby, Nick, and Scottie ultimately keep believing because they need to—they need wholeness and continuity between past and present, even if it is only an illusion.

While these ending do allow their protagonists to "keep moving," as I suggested earlier, it is important to note that the direction of their movement isn't necessarily forward. The choice of Gatsby, Nick, and Scottie to continue believing in their ideal equates to running in place, if not a direct step backward. Having been confronted with the truth and given the opportunity to reject what they had admired specifically for its seeming wholeness, all three men choose to go back to their comforting fictions. While such a choice will allow them to continue functioning because it avoids total annihilation of their concept of themselves, their values, and their national identity, it is ultimately a conscious choice to retain the nostalgic ideal of a person, an American community, and a self that never existed. Movement forward is a self-sustained illusion.

"You were the counterfeit": Fascination and "The Definitive Version"

In order to understand why both Gatsby and Vertigo's narratives support an idealized representation of a much more problematic and flawed reality, it is necessary to recognize the importance of 'return' to noir as a genre. Elizabeth Cowie poses one of the central questions of the popular sub-field of noir studies when confronted with its own strange popularity: "What must be explained is the continuing fascination with this fantasy long after the historical period that is supposed to justify it" (qtd. in Harris 4). Winifred Fluck rejects what would seem to be the easiest reason for its appeal, collective reveling in the "critical or subversive function of film noir"—in other words, critics' enjoyment of being critical (381). Noir rejected contemporary narrative trends towards romance and optimism and the aesthetics of Classic Hollywood style as part of a larger critique of post-War America and an awakening to social "corruption" (381). Replicating such critiques might seem to be "a sign of maturity, a willingness to face the 'reality' of American life," yet many more penetrating critiques of American society exist that are not as earnestly esteemed for their "darkness" or repeated as frequently as noir (382).

Oliver Harris sees fascination itself, simultaneously one of noir's most "overexposed" and yet "almost completely overlooked" areas, as significant to noir study: "For while noir's critical history began effectively at the same moment that cinematic fascination became central to psychoanalytic film theory—the mid-1970s—when noir was called 'fascinating,' the term itself passed with no more theoretical definition than in its empty, everyday use" (3). Freud first employed the term, also called "love bondage," in a psychoanalytic context to describe an extreme state of romantic love that he equated to hypnosis: "[fascination] resembles the state...in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotiser...The conscious personality has entirely vanished; will and discernment are lost. All feelings and thoughts are bent in the direction determined by the hypnotiser" (11). Therefore, fascination is a state in

which the fascinated subject experiences a paralysis of his or her critical abilities. Ironically, such a critical paralysis seems to have often plagued the "fascinated" critics of film noir. Fluck notes that fascination with noir has been a thread within noir criticism inseparable from the critique itself: "The problem with most descriptive analyses of *film noir* is that they are marred by what has motivated them: the open fascination with the object of study that gives many of these discussions an unmistakable identificatory note" (380). Harris suggests that it is precisely the preference for being uncritically fascinated and losing the sense of a line between fantasy and reality that fuels this trend in noir; the "triumph" of the "dispassionate, analytical eye over a gaze distorted by desire...*feels* like a defeat, suggesting that what must be recovered is in fact precisely the naïve affinity, the apparently uncritical and unhistorical 'identificatory' note" (4). Critics are fascinated by these texts in part because they want to be—dissecting the text for the causes of this fascination will separate the real from the ideal and shatter the much more pleasant hypnotic illusion.

Part of noir's hypnotizing power is linked to both the protagonist's and the audience's relationship to the past. As Frank Krutnik notes, many noir films "are fundamentally concerned with a heightened 'economy of seduction' (involving transgressions of the licit and the rational boundaries of desire and identity)" (28). Noir films feature seduction within their narratives—the femme fatale's seduction of the protagonist, of course, which moves the plot forward, but also the alluring idea of redemption and return to an ideal, uncorrupted past. Noir films create an "economy of seduction" by extending these seductive possibilities to involve their audiences; viewers are linked with the "illicit" elements of the film through the voyeuristic pleasures of viewing sex and violence. Their original audiences might also identify with the desire for postwar simplicity while, paradoxically, experiencing a kind of instant nostalgia for noir's

dynamic, dramatic version of reality, which allows these desires to be explored through narratives that extend wartime hypermasculinity and violence. For modern audiences, this original fascination remains, along with nostalgia for a version of the past that only exists on film. As in noir-like texts such as *Vertigo* and *The Great Gatbsy*, one of the ways that many noir films manifest this element of the "economy of seduction" is, as Paul Schrader puts it, their "retreats into the past" (58 qtd. in Naremore 211). The association of fascination and nostalgia persists from the "'original' pictures" of the 1940s and 50s, into the "new" tradition of nostalgic neo-noir films that, according to James Naremore, have become "part of a worldwide mass memory; a dream image of bygone glamour" (39).

A recent example of the popularity of noir aesthetics is AMC's critically acclaimed television series *Mad Men*, a contemplation of late 1950s and 1960s American culture through the advertising industry. The show employs many tropes of noir film: Don Draper, the show's hyper-masculine protagonist, is a former soldier so traumatized by war that he switches identities with a soldier killed in the same explosion that wounded him in order to return home. He typifies the class "mediator" role as a member of the business elite, a partner in a successful advertising agency, with working class roots. Not unlike Gatsby, Don is a morally compromised self-made man who lives within the identity he has constructed for himself, yet is frequently haunted by a past self that won't seem to stay buried. Just as Don juggles his identities, he also juggles relationships with the multiple glamorous women with which he is involved. As Jim Hansen notes, *Mad Men* also borrows from the genre with the "noir-style flashbacks" it uses "to fill in the gaps about Don's past" in episodes such as "Seven Twenty Three" (160).

The show's popularity again begs the question of the appeal of noir—what is it about the strange mixture of corruption, crime, and existential confusion with glamour, sex, and retro

sensibilities that audiences find appealing? The world of *Mad Men* is in some ways inviting—it is not difficult to imagine why American audiences enjoy watching the dramatic adventures of beautiful, extremely well-dressed, rich white people of the glamorous past, or even enjoy watching them smoke and drink their way through the expected angst and melodrama. There is even an understandable amount of satisfaction in watching a pre-ecoconscious 1950s family dump the trash of their picnic lunch on the ground and walk away, or listening to men at the advertising agency openly objectify their female secretaries. Mark Greif explains the pleasure arising from this phenomena as "an unpleasant little entry in the genre of Now We Know Better," suggesting that *Mad Men* "expose[s] what is most pompous and self-regarding in our own time: namely, an unearned pride in our supposed superiority when it comes to health and restraint, the condition of women, and the toleration of (some) difference in ethnicity and sexuality. *Mad Men* flatters us where we deserve to be scourged" (qtd. in Berube 346).

Other critics find more to the appeal and agenda of the show than social self-congratulation. Caroline Levine's understanding of *Mad Men* mirrors Fluck's and Harris' observation about the "identificatory" properties of noir for its viewers. Levine suggests that audiences may find themselves identifying with the show's nostalgic depictions of 1950s life even as they are repulsed by its less flattering examples of retro Americana:

> ...the shock of the banal would not work in a representation that merely distanced us from the world represented: it must offer us the play of familiarity in strangeness [...] From episode to episode, *Mad Men* actually gives us very little reason to leap to the conclusion that we are now postrace and postgender, but it does give us a strong incentive to entertain the serious and radical political questions: Is change possible? And if so, how does it happen?" (qtd. in Berube 347)

Jeremy Varon adds that the show suggests an unresolved ending to the American "happiness problem": "If we had [resolved them], why would our culture continually stage the saga of upper-middle-class discontent, with *Mad Men* itself emerging as the latest, captivating edition?"

(qtd. in Berube 347). Likewise, Richard H. Millington sees such texts as another entry in the long list of commenters since Toqueville attempting to chronicle "the nature and condition of the American character" through "an account of the distinctive condition of American middle-class culture" (135). *Mad Men*, *Vertigo, Gatsby*, and many other returns to noir frameworks of repulsion and fascination "negotiate a terrain configured by...interlinked authority structures—psychic, familial, social, sexual—that endanger pleasure and freedom," ultimately chronicling such characters' capacity for self-entrapment (Millington 136). Don, Gatsby, Nick, Scottie, and the audiences who are fascinated by them are victims of their own desire—for happiness, fulfillment, and belonging, as well as for freedom from the past and for the nostalgic return to it.

This penchant for fascination and the compulsive return to noir's ability to fascinate is mirrored in the long history of obsession, return, and fascination associated with *Gatsby* and *Vertigo*, two texts that have come to stand as prime examples of "great" American art. Baz Luhrmann's forthcoming film is only the most recent in a long line of *Gatsby* adaptations. According to Leff Leonard, Fitzgerald's novel has been adapted three times as a play, twice as a television production, and once as an opera (51). This is also its fourth time being released as a feature film (Gillespie 48).[14] Previous *Gatsby* films have not met with critical success. According to Wheeler Winston Dixon, the first adaptation, the 1926 silent film *The Great Gatsby*, suffered from the limitations of the medium in regards to narration. Forced to rely on intertitles to convey dialogue and description, the film attempted to put too much of the novel's text into the film, which, according to Dixon, "inevitably cut down the immediacy of the film's visual power"

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[14] It has also, remarkably, been released as a videogame three times within the past three years. The game that started the recent trend, a 2010 "hidden object" game, seems to point to its own nostalgia by asking the player to "find clocks" hidden "in the scenery." The opportunity to play through the novel's story as Gatsby interestingly inscribes an identification with Gatsby similar to Nick's onto the player (Carter).

(289). 1920s audiences seem to have agreed with this summation, since "at least one critic" cited the intertitles as "both excessive and badly written" (289). Critics such as John Cohen also pointed to the production's rewritten, saccharine ending as a major flaw, citing "a slightly moronic title explaining that some people (meaning that magnificent he-man Gatsby) live and die, but for the happiness of others. The picture illustrating this subtitle shows Daisy and her husband Tom and their tot draped beautifully on the porch of their happy home'" (qtd. in Leonard 52).

Attempting to learn from its predecessor's mistakes, the next adaptation in 1948 emphasized the novel's action, sex, and violence. The film spotlighted its star, Alan Ladd, and went for a darker, grittier interpretation consistent, notably, with the films of its time, including "static compositions and noir-ish lighting produc[ing] a melancholy atmostphere" (Leonard 52). According to Dixon, the film made many departures from the source text, including scenes in which "Gatbsy 'bumps off' rival gang members during a Prohibition shoot-out" and even punches one of his party guests "to consolidate his reputation as a man of action" (291). Bosely Crowther, a New York Times critic, praised the film for its "long and lingering look at a patient and saturnine fellow who is plagued by desperate love," but critiques the film's inability to "present us with the picture of a strangely self-made man as the pitiful victim of the time and his own expansive greed" (qtd. in Dixon 291).

The third adaptation, Jack Clayton's 1974 version with Robert Redford and Mia Farrow and a script by Francis Ford Coppola tried again to approach *Gatsby* from a different angle, focusing this time almost solely on Gatbsy and Daisy's romance. The film was a gamble, expensive for its time with a $65 million production cost and long with a runtime of 144 minutes. Ultimately, the gamble didn't pay off. As Nick Gillespie notes, the film, for all its star power and

attention to well-lit and visually appealing sets and costumes, "had all the moxie of a sun-faded Ralph Lauren clothing catalog. Despite decent box office, it was widely panned as little more than a failed fashion statement" (49).

The reasons for the critical and popular failure of past *Gatsby* adaptations are multiple, though all seem to return circumspectly to the reason for their creation—the desire to succeed in creating a satisfying cinematic translation of the novel, a desire strikingly similar to Gatsby's own impossible American Dream. Dixon expresses this frustration, beginning his history of *Gatsby*'s adaptations by tersely stating, "given the novel's status as a contemporary classic, one would think that the definitive version would have been produced long ago" (287). It is this drive to get *Gatbsy* right, to create the "definitive version" that likely has fuelled past doomed projects. While it is impossible to know the motivation for each of these productions, particularly the earlier films about which little was documented, much about their perceived flaws seems to suggest idealization of the subject material. The 1926 film held its source text in enough reverence that it attempted to include as much original narration as possible, perhaps too much. Paradoxically, the director chose to change its ending, but did so in a way that, like Nick's eulogy-like closing in the original text, emphasizes Gatsby's heroism and erases his criminality. The 1948 film made Gatsby into a more literal noir hero, yet apparently did not make him a "pitiful" or "greedy" figure, suggesting an idealization similar to its predecessor. The 1974 production was more openly enamored with its subject matter; Dixon notes that Coppola took fourteen months to write his screenplay, his extreme care and trepidation reportedly promoted by Coppola's impression that he "was tampering with greatness" (Dixon 292). The idealization of the text and idealization of its hero suggests an unusual investment in Dixon's imperative to "get it right."

It's important to note that Dixon's frustration also speaks to audience and critical desires and expectations for these adaptations. Critical responses to *Gatsby* adaptations often clearly desire to see the novel perfectly recaptured on film. Many critics agree with Celia Wren in her assessment of the immense challenge of capturing Gatsby's "elusive" qualities. How to communicate onscreen the sense that Gatsby's mind "engenders and encompasses 'a universe of ineffable gaudiness?'" As Hampton Stevens points out, "How do you draw something like 'romp like the mind of God' on a storyboard?"

Stevens suggests that this effect is more than another entry into a "The Book Is Always Better Than the Movie" cliché, but arises instead from the particularities of the text: "...*Gatsby* is frankly thin on story, but incredibly thick with introspection, thoughts unspoken, intricately woven metaphor, and long, dazzling descriptions of otherwise mundane things like sunsets, front lawns and angry wives that are only special because of how the narrator describes them." As Leonard notes, the challenges in adapting *Gatbsy* to a non-textual medium tend to come with the thematically important, but theatrically problematic emptiness of many of its central characters and the difficulty with communicating Nick's first-person narrative: "Fitzgerald had concealed the vacuum with what he called 'blankets of excellent prose' and a dramatist had to find stageworthy equivalents." (51) To make up for these absences, many adaptors, as Leonard notes, compensate with "blankets of spectacle"--gaudy, campy 1920s-themed set pieces, and emphasis of the novel's sex and violence (Leonard 51).

These difficulties might suggest attempts to adapt *Gatsby* into any medium besides a textual or aural one are doomed to fail not because they chase a desire to recreate unto perfection the experience of reading excellent prose and reading through another person's subjectivity, but because of the limitations of visual mediums. To Stevens, they seem to signal just such a failure

inherent in the difficulty of portraying internal worlds through film: "He [Fitzgerald] delves deeply into his character's thoughts, Nick's semi-omnipotent narration describing motives and sensations that simply don't translate well to the screen." As an example, Stevens cites the final moments of the 2001 A&E television adaptation, which feature Nick (Paul Rudd) delivering the novel's famous "boats against the current" lines as voiceover. Onscreen, and almost parodically on-the-nose, Gatsby and Daisy, in rowboats, struggle to row against an actual current. The ridiculousness of the image, Stevens suggests, comes from weakness of film as a medium in comparison to the novel's ability to describe intellectual experience: "Fitzgerald isn't saying life looks like rowing boats against a current. He's saying that's what life feels like." Stevens' critique of visual media, while certainly correct in his cited example, cannot be substantiated for every such project in all visual mediums. A prime counter-argument is the recent and critically successful stage adapation, *Gatz*, by New York theater company Elevator Repair Service. *Gatz* has had a long and interesting history; it began as a workshop in 2005, but was repeatedly shut down or postponed from playing in New York by the Fitzgerald Estate and its support of a more conventional Gatsby stage adaptation gunning for Broadway (Wallenberg 137).[15] After the other production ran its course, *Gatz*'s popularity and its status, at last, as the only *Gatsby* act in town landed the production a spot at the popular New York Public Theater through May of 2012, as well as an international tour in London in June and July of the same year (Wren).

While the mediums of film and stage are by no means identical, the reasons why *Gatz* seems to work while screen adaptations fail are narrational and visual, properties also central to any film *Gatsby*. *Gatz*'s critical success, with positive reviews from American fixtures like *The*

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[15] Not surprisingly, given the reception history of past Gatsby adaptations, this more "conventional" and "commercial" version, called "less than satisfying" by *Variety*, died still in its out-of-town tryouts (Mead).

New Yorker and acclaim during its international tour from sources like *The Guardian* and *Time Out London*, is an interesting study in how the emphasis of past adaptations, film or stage, on "the definitive" version of *Gatsby,* and similar audience expectations, might have sabotaged their own projects. The premise for *Gatz* is fairly simple. Since it is, of course, impossible to encapsulate something like Gatsby's "unutterable visions" in a visual image, the production doesn't even try—paradoxically, this seems to be why it works. As Wren notes, "the troupe doesn't aim to channel, or even approximate, the 1925 novel. Instead the show turns a series of oddball contemporary images into a sounding board that resonates with the novel's observations and with our own reactions to them."

Rather than attempting to elaborately recreate and situate *The Great Gatbsy* within its 1920s setting, as past film adaptations attempted, *Gatz* forgoes spectacle and sets its entire story within a single room in a drab modern office. The story's narrator, played by Scott Shepherd, is a bored office worker who stumbles upon a paperback copy of *The Great Gatsby* left on his desk. Shepherd's narrator proceeds over the next six hours to read aloud the entire novel, every word of it. As he reads, the narrator becomes increasingly involved in the story, while his contemporary world comes to mirror Gatsby's when coworkers seem to fill the roles of the novel's main characters and act out the novel's familiar events. This formula works to *Gatz*'s advantage for several reasons, one of which is its creative solution to the problem of Nick's first person, unreliable narration that is obvious in hindsight—don't change a single thing. It recognizes that the process of reading is not only important to preserving narrative voice, but also that Nick's narration opens up multiple levels of "reading" occurring simultaneously in the text: the audience reads an account of Nick's experiences which he is, he tells us, writing after

the fact; Nick and other characters "read" Gatsby's character; and Gatsby engages in a symbolic "reading" of Daisy.[16]

The lack of spectacle and engagement with the novel's own play with the idealizing process of "reading," whether reading people or texts, is another reason why the production seems to work. Critics and audiences seem to respond to *Gatz*'s level of substance and frank address of the fascinating capacities of the reading process through the exploration of a particularly fascinating text. One of the most common complaints about film adaptations of the novel is their emptiness; the first three films were panned for their lame, neutered ending, reading of Gatsby lacking in nuance, and lifeless, fashion-centric visuals, respectively. *Gatz* dismisses "blankets of spectacle" or fascination with the ultimately empty character of Gatsby in the most obvious way, forgoing the distractions of glamour to focus instead on the method of the text's dissemination and its effects on characters, narrator, and the audience itself.

Christopher Wallenberg's review of *Gatz*, "Has It Happened Yet?," in *American Theater* seems to have missed the point by suggesting that *Gatz* might be "It"—the "definitive version," the now mythic "something better" that other adaptations have failed to provide. It is a label that seems to slide off of the production's calculated lack of desire to approximate its source text. Rather than attempting to recreate the novel or to present the novel to the audience, *Gatz* becomes, as *Time Out London*, points out, about fascination with fascinating texts; it is "a love

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[16] "What He Learned..." Volandes, Stellene. *Town & Country*. 166.5382 (Apr 2012):1-3. Actor Scott Shepherd's comments to *Town & Country* about the production would suggest that this choice and its importance to this particular text was a major consideration when developing *Gatz*. "This spring's revival of Gatz comes on the heels of the announcement that Baz Luhrman's impending film version will be released in 3-D. Such cinematic hoopla will not, Shepherd says, resolve the central problem of past adaptations. 'A director needs to decide what to do about the narrator—that's what makes it work,' he says, 'But they have all tried to depict things without that filter. And they've all been pretty terrible.'"

letter to the beguiling power of a great book," *The Great Gatsby* or any other great book, and not a recreation of the book itself. *Gatz* avoids attempting to become a "definitive version" because it does not seem to view itself as an adaptation in the traditional sense. The narrator is not Nick any more than his thuggish boss with his shabby pink sport coat is meant to "really" be Gatsby in the world of the play. Rather than attempting to stage *Gatsby*, what *Gatz* tries to approximate is the process of reading and reader/viewer identification with fictional characters and situations. It uses *Gatsby* to do this, but *Gatz* does not try to be or recapture *Gatbsy*.

Expectations for Luhrman's *Gatsby*, based on past *Gatsby* adaptations and the released production details and trailers, range from cautiously interested to outright dismissive. The common thread of objections to the new *Gatsby* project, beyond the problems of adapting novels or of adapting this notoriously difficult novel, is the possibility of overwhelming spectacle that comes with the choice of Luhrmann as director. In an article for *The Guardian*, Sarah Churchwell cites miscasting and misunderstanding of Gatsby's presence and dubious centrality in the novel as the film's flaw. Unfavorable comparisons of Luhrmann's adaptation with the 1974 film abound: "...the story makes no sense unless Gatbsy is less dominant than Tom Buchanan. Gatsby aspires to be as powerful as Tom...Gatsby may be tough, but he is often 'bewildered' by the rules of the Buchanans'....aristocratic world. A Redford or a DiCaprio will never seem convincingly ill-at-ease." The seemingly central focus on Gatbsy's and Daisy's romance, as in the 1974 version, and inclusion of extended scenes featuring the couple, for Nick Gillespie, also seem to portend a fundamental misunderstanding of the Gatbsy character: "Based on the trailers and ads made available so far, the new movie likely errs in the same fundamental way that the Redford version did. That is, it conceives of Gatsby ultimately as a grand love story

between the title character and the object of his obsessive love, Daisy. [...] Gatbsy, despite the whirl of excitement and mystery about him, is an empty suit."

Comparisons to the 1974 production's reputation as a 144 minute fashion ad—and worries that the film might be just that, "empty suits"—were also encouraged, even in early stages of production, by the film's costume design collaboration with Prada and the ensuing wave of "*Gatsby*-inspired" fashion (Binkley). Commentators who gush that "Prada has landed what it calls a 'leading role' in Baz Luhrmann's *Great Gatsby*" don't do the production any favors in terms of worries about spectacle overwhelming the narrative (Vivarelli). The choice to release the film in 3D, itself a kind of decoration with little conceivable need in a period drama, seems dubious—"as if," Gillespie notes, "the filmmakers are worried that the story along—which includes sex, murder, and copious amounts of Prohitibtion-era booze—isn't quite riveting enough" (149).[17]

Despite the general critical skepticism about *Gatbsy*'s adaptability, Celia Wren suggests that the timing is ideal for another look at the novel's statement about aristocracy in 1920s New York:

> Set as it is in the Roaring Twenties—the lead-up to the Great Depression—Fitzgerald's tale seems to foreshadow our own era's housing bubble and subsequent economic meltdown. The descriptions of Gatbsy's parties and Tom Buchanan's polo ponies seem to point toward current income disparities and the Occupy Wall Street movement. Who are the Gatsby and the Buchanans if not the One Percent? [18]

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[17] The director cites his inspiration by Fitzgerald's love "of all things modern, of cinema" as a primary reason for the choice to film in 3D. ("Baz Luhrmann Speaks") This claim is somewhat dubious given that Fitzgerald once called film "a more glittering, a grosser power...a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thoughts, the most obvious emotion" (qtd. in Stevens).

[18] Echoes of the Occupy movement and modern incarnations of economic disparity and classism are likely to appear in the Luhrmann *Gatsby*, since the director revealed in an interview: "In that moment before the financial crisis of 2008, I remember thinking that something wasn't quite

Luhrmann's comments on his vision suggest a production thoroughly grounded in the contemporary relevance of the novel's themes, and do little to relieve the ambivalence surrounding the role of Nick Carraway's narration, the centrality of Gatsby, or overwhelming visuals. Luhrmann's recognition of the problem of conveying Nick's narration, "one of the big devices in the book" as "disembodied voiceover" suggest understanding of the role of narration in the novel, as does the still unrevealed method the production team chose to "show Nick actually dealing with the writing, dealing with his experience of Gatbsy, as he does in the novel." Other comments about attempting to address ways to bring the process of reading and its symbolic resonance for Nick and Gatsby into the production suggest spectacle over substance. Released footage of the film is visually-oriented in the ways typically associated with Luhrmann films complete with the over-the-top wild partying, extreme camera perspectives, dizzying camera tracking, the promised dazzling costumes, added screen time for the Gatbsy/Daisy romance, and an all-star cast. Luhrmann states that his team "knew we had to unlock for the audience a way of letting them feel what it was like to read Fitzgerald's book in the 1920s—to be in New York City at that time." Luhrmann's comment seems to suggest an attempt at historical and cultural immersion through visual spectacle at the expense of exposing the "reading" process—Gatsby's, Nick's, the novel's, the production's and the audience's readings of their ideal objects ("Baz Luhrmann Speaks").

Fault for the seemingly never-ending quest for adaptation perfection rests ultimately on both audiences and filmmakers for replicating Gatsby's and Nick's doomed idealization. It is important to remember, of course, that no matter what Luhrmann's *Gatsby* does, someone will

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right. The greed and wealth were very reminiscent of *The Great Gatsby*. I thought, 'The time is right to make this film.'" (qtd. in Wilson)

be displeased. Expectations are impossibly high, and the desire for a "definitive" *Gatsby* still lurks underneath many critiques of the film, as does the extremely individual criteria for what would comprise that perfect film. In the "definitive" film, critics look for Gatsby's Daisy, or Nick's Gatsby, the fictional construct to which the real thing, right before their eyes, cannot compare. Likewise, films that attempt to be *Gatsby*, particularly through the use of spectacle, often end up being Gatsby instead. While it is impossible to know until the film's release in May 2013, the new *Gatsby* seems poised to repeat predecessors' mistakes, and Nick's mistake, by idealizing Gatsby and reveling in spectacle. Like Nick, such extravagant adaptations pin expectations and hopes on a glamorous but essentially empty product. The novel's epigraph seems to best describe the obstacles facing its past, present, and future adaptations:

> Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
> If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
> Till she cry 'Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
> I must have you!' (*Gatsby* 1)

Gatsby hopes, with his architectural nightmare of a mansion, flashy suits and silk shirts, trendy car, and wild parties, to convince Daisy that he belongs in her aristocratic world. Nick is at first taken in by the romance of Gatsby's decadent lifestyle and mysterious past, but spectacle doesn't move Daisy. Walking with Daisy through one of Gatsby's parties, Nick is forced to acknowledge aspects of their spectacle that, because of their extravagant desire to please and to appear grand, appear suddenly gaudy, showy, cheap: "I felt an unpleasantness in the air, a pervading harshness that hadn't been there before, or perhaps I had merely grown used to it...now I was looking at it again, through Daisy's eyes. It is invariably saddening to look through new eyes at things upon which you have expended your own powers of adjustment" (*Gatbsy* 96). Adaptations of *Gatsby* that aspire through visual spectacle or the romance of the empty Gatsby himself to woo viewers with feats of gold-hatted high-bouncing suffer from modern equivalents of Gatsby's own old

delusion, and seem fated to experience his disappointment when such glamorous exteriors fail to "move" audiences.

The desire for the "definitive" *Gatsby* finds a counterpoint in critical and fan fascination with *Vertigo*, the most recent and visible manifestation of which is its ascension to the top of the British Film Institute's Greatest Films of All Time list. The poll, held every ten years, assembles an international pool of film scholars and industry insiders—critics, academics, distributors, writers, and programmers—to vote for the films they believe are the "greatest." Seemingly aware of how slippery and problematic a term like "greatest" can be, the voters are encouraged by BFI to interpret the qualifier "greatest" individually, meaning anything from historical impact or aesthetic innovation to impact on a personal view of cinema. The results of the BFI poll, always the subject of some media curiosity, exploded onto newsstands in 2012, more visible than it had been for years. After fifty years topping list as the Greatest Film of All Time, *Citizen Kane* lost the crown to *Vertigo* by a margin of thirty-four votes.

Speculation about the reasons for *Vertigo*'s sudden popularity abounded, ranging from the film's slowly shifting critical reception, to the changing structure of a modernizing BFI, to nostalgic desire for the personal in the reviewers themselves (Kemp). *Vertigo* has climbed a long way in critical estimation since its initial release. As Mark Brown, a current film critic for the UK newspaper *The Guardian,* recalls, the Manchester *Guardian*'s critic 54 years ago was less than kind in a review of the newly released picture: "It tells a most unlikely tale about wife-murder, and tells it for more than two hours in a style that is slow, wordy, and apparently casual" (Brown). Thomas Leitch traces critical reception of *Vertigo* and its director from its beginnings to the present. In the fifties Hitchcock was thought to be "an apolitical entertainer" and even an "opportunist," though this perception changed in the 1970s through mid-1980s with the rise of

the auteur and Hitchcock's status as humanist and universalist. A boom in feminist *Vertigo* criticism beginning in the late 1980s through the 90s, after post-structuralism killed the auteur, recast the film as "a valued ideological prize...to win or lose."[19] *Vertigo*'s indeterminate current function is working as, as Leitch puts it, "grist for an all-devouring political mill" (11).

The film industry itself has also undergone numerous changes since the inception of the BFI poll. The change in the poll's votership over even the last ten years is notable, with 144 voters asked to participate in 2002 and 846 invited in 2012. BFI coordinators suggest that the increase "reflects the impact of the Internet and proliferation and increased influence of film commentators using this new medium" (qtd. in Kemp). Beyond the myriad implications of the digitization of film and the proliferation of on-demand options on how audiences view film, technological advances and web-interconnectedness have changed how they think about it. Film blogging in particular has increased the amount of film commentary written and read, changing film reception and the method of "publishing" ideas; film criticism is no longer solely a niche journalistic or academic function. The expansion of the BFI poll sought to include noted critics across many types of media and wider circles of influence, perhaps accounting for a change in overall film preference from its relative stability in past years simply by virtue of a new batch of voters, and more of them. Nick James, current editor of the magazine that carries BFI's poll,

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[19] Leitch's comment refers to seminal Hitchcock critic Robin Wood's question in *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*—"Can Hitchcock be saved for feminism?" (371)—that typified this shifting critical opinion. Tania Modelski was on the forefront of feminist critics to respond to Wood's question and the question of "saving" Hitchcock: "...the stated goal of the one male critic concerned with feminism is to reestablish the authority of the artist—to 'save' Hitchcock. For Wood, political 'progressiveness' has come to replace moral complexity as the criterion by which to judge Hitchcock's art, but the point remains the same—to justify the ways of the auteur to the filmgoing public. The feminist critics I have mentioned, by contrast, use Hitchcock's works as a means to elucidate issues and problems relevant to women in patriarchy. In so doing these critics implicitly challenge and decenter directorial authority by considering Hitchcock's work as the expression of cultural attitudes and practices existing to some extent outside the artist's control" (3)

Sight & Sound, believes that *Vertigo*'s rise in popularity may have the most to do with the "changing culture of film criticism": "Cinephilia has changed in that there's less of a massive respect for the all-singing, all-dancing, every technological achievement in one film kind of film, like Citizen Kane...People are moving towards more personal films, ones that they can react to personally in their own lives, and *Vertigo* is that kind of film, especially if you watch it more than once. It is a film that grows and grows on you" (Brown).

This tendency towards the "personal" film, as well as the draw to films that inspire and even seem to necessitate return, suggest that what I have called fascination is at play in *Vertigo*'s current popularity, a suggestion substantiated by the high volume of sentimental or idealizing commentary in critical responses to the film. As Katie Trumpener notes, *Vertigo* "has long been the object of unusually obsessive, self-involved, often autobiographical commentary" (186). D. A. Miller's nostalgic, self-reflective passage in his 2008 *Film Quarterly* article is typical of a mountain of similarly personal, almost mystical comments from a variety of Vertigo critics: "Was this first viewing—bored, restive, and uncomprehending—nonetheless so magnetic that it is drawing me still? Does it return, by some mundane memory trigger or mysterious unconscious agency to repossess me?" (12). Douglas Cunningham, seemingly without irony, devotes half a page of his article on pilgrimages to San Francisco by *Vertigo* fans and "spiritual" properties of their nostalgic desire to his own highly personal nostalgic experience of the film: "I watched Vertigo again. Everything—in the film, in my life—suddenly made sense...Vertigo gained more personal and, later, intellectual meaning for me as a result of a painful romantic encounter I mapped onto the narrative during a second viewing of the film" (127). As Trumpener notes, detailed accounts of the circumstances of his first viewing of *Vertigo*—and only of *Vertigo*—and a count of the twenty-six times since finds its way into even seminal Hitchcock critic Donald

Spoto's *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures* (186). Likewise, *Vertigo*'s two film tributes/remakes, Brian De Palma's 1976 *Obsession* with a score by *Vertigo* composer Bernard Hermann and Mike Figgis's 1991 *Liebestraum,* in which Kim Novak plays a minor part, play out their filmmakers' own obsessions with their source material (Rafferty).

Beyond instances of sentimental recall and return, however, critical approaches that identify with Scottie or unintentionally mirror his attempt to force Madeleine and Judy to conform to his desire partake in the very fetishization of the feminine that they seek to expose. Lawrence Shaffer's appropriately titled "Obsessed with *Vertigo*" demonstrates a viewer affiliation with Scottie's point of view. Schaffer describes the revelation of Judy's duplicity as "worse than if the camera had suddenly pulled back to include Hitchcock in the frame directing Kim Novak, because it is the internal integrity of the fiction that has been destroyed. There seems nothing in the film now worth salvaging" (386). This distress on the part of the viewer, Schaffer suggests, is ameliorated by the inability to see the transgressional Judy as, in reality, the woman behind the perfect Madeleine: "But as we keep watching Judy, the integrity of appearances reasserts itself. For despite our new knowledge, we simply cannot see Judy as Madeleine, no more than in looking back we can re-see Madeleine as Judy" (386). Such a reading is clearly aligned with Scottie's idealization of Madeleine, and, with Scottie, misreads and confuses the relationship between the two women. Like Scottie, the critic seems to have difficulty keeping straight the fundamental fictional nature of Scottie's "Madeleine." Schaffer separates Madeleine from Judy's criminality in order to keep his viewing of the romance of the first part of the film intact.

Katie Trumpener and Paula Marantz Cohen suggest the film encourages such confusion, inciting viewers to lose themselves in the mise-en-abyme of an obsession that radiates outwards

from the film to replicate itself in both critical and uncritical audiences. Cohen points to the film's deliberate artificiality and lack of information as one of the factors involved in its confusion between real and fictional images (166). The film seems to intentionally employ a kind of dream logic in the way it moves from action to action, attempting to pull viewers into Scottie's own dreamlike confusion. How, for example, did Scottie get down from the ledge at the beginning of the film?[20] Likewise, Madeleine disappears spectacularly without any explanation several times early in the film, seeming to corroborate Elster's fears of supernatural forces surrounding her. Even when the possession story is revealed to be a fraud, such disappearances are never explained: how did Madeleine elude Scottie at the McKittrick Hotel? Cohen suggests that even explanations "that Judy is really Madeleine" do nothing to "dissipate the confusion of identity surrounding the character. The question of meaning is detached from the literal and causal so that even when logical explanations are given, they cease to be fully elucidating" (167). Katie Trumpener similarly points out the way in which the film works to confuse Madeleine's and Judy's identities for the viewer, and to specifically involve the viewer in Scottie's confusion between the ideal and the real, finding the flaw in Schaffer's romantic separation of the two women: "Yet how meaningful has the distinction between the original and imitation remained for us? When Judy falls from the roof, Madeleine dies again with her; the original and the copy break together (and in the end, it is hard to tell which is which, if Madeleine is a copy of Judy or Judy of Madeleine...We have projected ourselves into the movie projected for us; we become the outermost layer of the spiral" (183). By disorienting in the logical flow from action to action

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[20] Robin Wood famously suggested that, in a way, Scottie is hanging over that same ledge for the entire film. That the audience never sees him return to the ground leaves us hanging with him, engaged in his drama of desire and fear of falling: "There seems to be no way he could have got down. The effect is of leaving him, throughout the film, metaphorically suspended over a great abyss" (111).

and facilitating confusion between Madeleine and Judy, the film involves its audiences in Scottie's fantasy world.

Such confusion between fantasy and reality seems to permeate feminist criticism of the film that seeks to illuminate the film's reification of patriarchal logic, and to reclaim Judy, rather than Madeleine, as the "real woman" of the film. Susan White suggests that critical fascination with the figure of the woman-as-victim in the analyses of feminist critics such as Laura Mulvey, Tania Modelski, Karen Hollinger, Robin Wood, Stanley Cavell, William Rothman, and Virginia Wright Wexman displays "melancholy identification with female suffering and the woman as lost object" (925).[21] These critics, White suggests, tend to fixate on Judy's flashback, the first sequence from her point of view, and the pivotal revelation of Elster's plot that fractures audience identification, as somehow "sympathetically convey[ing]...the 'real' woman's point of view," (919) associating this "real" woman's subjectivity with "the position from which the truth of the narrative can be revealed" (920). Tim Groves supports White's reading, suggesting that, while the critical intention is to equate the figure of the "mother" to the "real" woman in support of a feminist and/or Marxist argument, the result is the unintentional casting of the "real" woman as an absolute victim: "The bedrock of critical thinking on Vertigo is the notion, found in all of these critics, that somewhere here the real woman, a victim, is speaking" (Groves). That this

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21 The melancholy identification in both critics and Scottie that White identifies seems, as Marilyn Fabe points out, to have a greater kinship with Giorgio Agamben's definition than with Freud's: "Freud believed that the person suffering from melancholy has regressed to a narcissistic identification with the lost object, incorporating the person into his or her own ego, rather than letting go of the object through the working-through process of mourning, which ends by freeing the individual to seek out new attachments. Agamben's melancholic is unable to mourn not because of a regressive identification with the lost object, but because the lost object is a fantasy creation. In melancholia, according to Agamben, 'the libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it has never been possessed appears as lost' (20) The result is melancholia: an endless grief that can never be worked through." (348)

victim represents "a single, dominating reality that knows itself, knows its priority, comes from a position that knows no blindness and seems to have no vested interest" is the site of the "danger" of such a reading (Groves).

Like Scottie, critics are engaged in both identification with Judy as the revealer of truth and in attempts to save her through a kind of detective work, to excavate the voice of the victim. Thus, Groves suggests, this critical attachment to Judy is to the "woman-as-victim":

> Such a figure only speaks as a victim. The construction of the feminine as a victim in *Vertigo* criticism preserves, in however fragile a manner, the implicitly masculine position of the critic who attempts to rescue 'her' from Scottie, Gavin, Carlotta's lover, Hitchcock, or the faceless studio executives. Is this not just how Lacanian psychoanalysis theorizes the function of femininity, to reflect male desire back to itself in a way that confirms the fictional unity of masculinity? (Groves)

Such a reading seems to avoid or bury several of the film's major tenets, first Judy's criminality and complicity in her fate—complicated when paired with a reading of Judy as the absolute victim—and finally the film's investment in the impossibility of distinction between the real and the image of desire. Readings that search for the "real" woman and locate Judy as the source of truth in the text fail to account for the fact that Judy also represents the possibility of being deceived. The desire to learn the "truth" of the film from Judy—"the (ultimately impossible) desire to stabilize the meaning of *Vertigo*"—seems to be the basis of many critics' fascination with the film: "The search by critics for the key to the text, for its master reading, can be interpreted as a melancholic attempt to avoid the loss of the critical object" (Groves). In their attempt to differentiate themselves from Scottie and his abusive and obsessive behavior towards Madeleine and Judy, critics often replicate his doomed quest to save the "real" woman—to rescue the "real" Madeleine from her supernatural or psychological torment, or to "save" the image of Madeleine in Judy.

Such a search for the "real"—the ideal object in disguise, lost by design in *Vertigo*—can only lead to infinite wandering and return, and more victims of Elster's fantasy. The desire for a "real" woman is the desire for a certain kind of feminist ideal, a version of Judy in the center of various male plots for dominance that retains her own voice despite constant attempts to repress or redesign it. Yet Judy is just as "used" by these critics, who overlook certain critical aspects of her actions and character and portray her as solely a victim, as she is by Scottie, or Elster, or Carlotta was by her Anglo lover. They recreate Judy as an ideal, repeating the cycle of idealization and the confusion between reality and fantasy that this process creates. It might be equally possible to relate such a reading to a kind of nostalgia for and idealization of the film itself; after all, this reading of Judy attempts not only to "rescue" Judy from Scottie's misrepresentation, but also to "save" *Vertigo* as a text relevant to current study. In this reading, Judy is a figure through which critics could read the text and stabilize its meaning, creating a "master reading" akin to *Gatsby* adaptors' desired "definitive version." The search for a "master reading" of the film is a search for knowledge, for the impossibility of understanding completely a film that was created to reflect and fragment its characters' and audience's desires for wholeness.

Critical returns to the film are mirrored in the trend of *Vertigo* tourism, the desire to make sense of and experience the fictional image as reality translated from theory to physical pilgrimage. As Douglas Cunningham notes, *Vertigo* lends itself particularly well to site-specific film tourism, since "Elster's entire murder scheme and its associated alibis depend almost exclusively on Scottie's desire to solve a puzzle of ephemeral history encoded within monuments, missions, markers, and the histories they represent" (126). Like Scottie, *Vertigo* tourists seem to believe that if they "could just find the key, the beginning" they could "put it

together," understanding and re-inhabiting the experience of viewing the film. Tourists, Cunningham suggests, search for Kracauer's "psychophysical correspondences," or "fluid interrelations between the physical world and the psychological dimension in the broadest sense of the word" (qtd. in Cunningham 123). By geographic proximity, viewers hope to "live" the viewing experience of *Vertigo*'s narrative, bridging the gap between fiction and reality in order to transcend the fourth wall and enter the romantic world of the film.

San Francisco offers many options for the *Vertigo* tourists attempt just that. A Friend in Town Tours offers a full-day Vertigo trip to all the major filming sites, accompanied by the Bernard Hermann soundtrack (Fabe 344). The film's Empire Hotel, previously the York in real life, was reborn in 2008 as "Hotel Vertigo," offering free, daily in-room screenings of the film 24 hours a day (Ashbury Park Press). For those that prefer to guide themselves, Kraft's and Leventhal's *Footsteps in the Fog: Alfred Hitchcock's San Francisco* devotes an entire chapter to painstakingly mapping out the location or inspiration for every shot in the film. However, as Marilyn Fabe notes, such real-life experiences will never be able to measure up to the ideal filmic representation: "Those who seek out the locations of Vertigo continue Scottie's doomed question to make a fantasy real, to diminish the gap between representation and reality, and thereby cling to an illusory means by which to overcome loss" (343). Not only have many of the monuments and locations from the film been the victims of urban erasure such as the long-gone Ernie's restaurant or the spot at Fort Point where Madeleine jumped into the bay—now blocked by post-9/11 security fences—but many never existed in the real world at all (Bly). Carlotta's gravestone at the Mission Dolores was a stage-prop, and the iconic tower at the Mission San Juan Bautista, was achieved through superimposing a painted tower over the film via matte shot

(Fabe 346).[22] Tourists and critics alike are caught in Scottie's spiral of confusing image and reality, desiring a "real" experience—a "master reading" or cinematic transcendence—of an idealized fiction.

The Green Light Shines On: Nostalgia and Idealization's Ripple Effect

Striving for such a "master reading" or "definitive version" that reveals the truth in these beloved texts is an almost inevitable recreation of the idealism they thematize and critique. "Beloved" or "classic" texts are invested with a special reverence and inescapably subject to study of their special, seductive properties. Critics and casual viewers alike are fascinated. In some ways, my own project many be equally guilty of duplicating Gatsby, Nick, and Scottie's obsession—I chose to study these texts because they are skillfully constructed, culturally relevant in this particular moment of American art, and thematically linked in productive ways. I also chose to study them because, like many others—the cinema professionals on the BFI panel, current adaptors, critics, or the millions of others who followed the stories of the Greatest Film voting in the news or watch each new Luhrmann *Gatsby* trailer—I enjoy them on a personal level, and am just as interested in attempting to study and understand them through my own readings and the readings of others.

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[22] Even more bizarre than the availability *Vertigo* film tours, grounded as the film is in the actual architecture of San Francisco, is the availability of *Gatsby*-themed tours. Gatsby's mansion in West Egg and the Buchanan's mansion in East Egg, as well as East and West Egg themselves, do not exist. Unlike San Francisco, in which many of the film's central settings have a physical presence or at least the exact spot where a prop once sat can be traced, there is no one, real-world referent green light for potential *Gatsby* tourists to flock to, no specific building in which Myrtle's party takes place, or exact location of Wilson's automotive shop. However, this hasn't stopped several industrious companies from offering *Gatsby* tours anyway. Fitzgerald modeled East and West Egg on Long Island "Gold Coast" where there are many mansions in the same vein as the ones described in the novel. The Long Island Visitor's bureau offers a "Gatsby Mansion" tour of several of the area's great estates. ("Gatsby's Gold Coast")

Writing critically about these texts in particular is a challenge—how to attempt a reading that doesn't try to pin down their meaning? How to critique past and present adaptations of *Gatbsy* without searching for where they go "wrong"? The narrative form and metatextual nature of these texts tempt audiences into a progression of recognition and realization of the human potential for fascination. The audience is first shown a tantalizingly mysterious character about whom we wonder, fantasize, and attempt to understand, our fascination encouraged by narrative framing or point of view. We are then shown a character who obsessively idealizes them—not recognizing their fascination in ourselves, we find Scottie's obsession disturbing, pathetic, and cruel, and Gatsby's obsession with the past hopelessly naïve and fundamentally corrupt. The narrative then so confuses the object of desire and the desire itself—for its characters and, I would argue, for its audience—that those who read texts professionally find themselves returning to *Gatsby* and *Vertigo*, longing to understand them through capturing their essence in prose or on film. Such a vision of perfect unity between audience and text—the reading that makes sense of everything—is a critical ideal, and, ultimately, an unreachable one.

Nor is the answer to be found in authorial intent. Perhaps its not surprising that the mise-en-abyme of both texts' study of identification and desire was created in artistic environments mirroring these preoccupations. Studies of Fitzgerald and Hitchcock however, tend to reveal both men attempting to understand their own identities through *The Great Gatsby* and *Vertigo*, works that became some of the most personal in their oeuvres. In his 1936 essay "The Crack-Up" for *Esquire* magazine, an older and more jaded Fitzgerald looked back on his career and his long-standing feelings of a lack of core identity. With the economic "Boom" of the 1920s firmly in the past, Fitzgerald described himself as ontologically confused and disillusioned: "It was strange to have no self—to be like a little boy left alone in a big house, who knew that now he

could do anything he wanted to do, but found that here was nothing that he wanted to do." If Fitzerald seems to describe himself similarly to Gatsby after Daisy's fall from grace, wandering around his empty mansion without a sense of purpose, such similarity may not have been coincidental. Fitzgerald concluded in the article that five individual men were the basis of the most important facets of his identity: his intellectual consciousness, his sense of the "good life" (a suspiciously Gatsby-esque figure)[23], his artistic conscience, his relations to other people, and his political consciousness ("Pasting It Together"). After the initial release of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald communicated this identification with Gatsby, his sense of being "pasted together" from pieces of other people, with friend John Peale Bishop, saying that the character "started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself—the amalgam was never complete in my mind" (qtd. in Quirk 589). In this way, Fitzgerald is perhaps even more like his divided narrator, Nick, who projects his own identity onto the glamorous, mysterious mirror of Gatsby.

Similar conclusions have been drawn by many critics about Alfred Hitchcock's personal connection to *Vertigo* and his exploration of creating the perfect woman. Hitchcock once described his attraction to the story of *Vertigo* as one predicated on the transformation on its female lead,

> of changing the woman's hair color—because it contained so much analogy to sex. This man changed and dressed up his woman, which seems like the reverse of stripping her naked. But it amounts to the same thing. I really made the film in order to get through to this subtle quality of a man's dreamlike nature. (qtd. in Spoto 399)

Donald Spoto reads personal identification with Scottie in Hitchcock's stated motivations for directing the film: "The man, of course, was really Hitchcock himself. Like James Stewart in

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[23] "That another man represented my sense of the 'good life,' though I saw him once in a decade, and since then he might have been hung. He is in the fur business in the Northwest and wouldn't like his name set down here. But in difficult situations I have tried to think what he would have thought, how he would have acted." ("Pasting It Together")

Vertigo, Hitchcock chose fantasy over reality, and he could not respond to a woman until she was refashioned to correspond with his dream" (399). This refashioning process, while true to some extent of all directors creating the "look" of their stars and of the fabricated nature of the Hollywood actress herself, was particularly true of Hitchcock's relationship to his original casting choice for the part of Madeleine/Judy, the blonde former beauty queen Vera Miles. Hitchcock first met Miles when he cast her for a small role in his television series of murder vignettes, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Hitchcock had just lost his favorite actress, an actress that "it was clear to everyone that Hitchcock idolized," Grace Kelly, to her marriage to the prince of Monaco and retirement from the film business.[24] As Spoto notes, Hitchcock told interviewers that he felt "abandoned" by Kelly when she married Prince Rainer, just as he had articulated feeling "abandoned" several years earlier by another favorite actress, Ingrid Bergman (379).

Hitchcock was looking for a new actress, and he announced that Vera Miles was "the girl who is going to replace Grace Kelly" (qtd. in Spoto 396). In a manner eerily similar to Scottie's physical control of Judy's appearance, Hitchcock's first move was to put Miles under contract and rigorously control her personal appearance. "She is not outstanding because she uses too much color," Hitchcock told Paramount costumer Edith Head, "She's swamped by color. I think the reason I was so impressed with her to begin with was that I saw her in black and white on television." As Head recalls, Hitchcock had her design an entire personal wardrobe for Miles in the understated, neutral colors he dictated to turn her into her ideal filmic image: "So we [Hitchcock and Head] reduced Vera to black and white photography" (qtd. in Spoto 373). Head also recalls Hitchcock's strict instructions about Kim Novak's costumes as Madeleine in *Vertigo*

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[24] Hitchcock tended to work with his favorite actors and actresses on multiple films. Grace Kelly appeared in Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*, *Rear Window*, and *To Catch a Thief*.

several years later, almost entirely neutrals and specifically the famous gray suit, a color particularly unflattering for blondes: "[Kim Novak] told me at our first meeting, I'll wear anything—so long as it isn't a suit; any color—so long as it isn't gray" (Head 15). Hitchcock, however insisted on a gray suit, that Madeleine must seem "as if she's just drifted out of the San Francisco fog" (Head 46). Hitchcock was also particularly strict with Miles' acting; for her part in *The Wrong Man*, Hitchcock insisted on working with her personally eight or nine hours a day, "training" her through her breakdown scene in the film until she was exhausted (Spoto 379). The echoes of Hitchcock's treatment of Miles are fairly clear in both Scottie's accusations about Judy's "training" to play Madeleine under Elster, and in Scottie's own process of grooming Judy to play Madeleine: "Did he train you? Did he rehearse you? Did he tell you exactly what to do, what to say?" Miles was originally cast as Madeleine in *Vertigo*, but ultimately had to opt out due to a pregnancy. Still, reflections of Hitchcock's relationship to Miles and to the long line of beautiful blonde actresses[25] he attempted to groom as his ideal, are unmistakable in Vertigo. Spoto suggests that admiration for and need to control his leading ladies, coupled with his disappointment with their need for personal lives outside of this image, finds its perfect parallel in Scottie, more so than in any of his other films: "In no other film did Hitchcock have so clear a masculine alter ego than James Stewart in this film...The belief that any beautiful woman was a deception, a cheat, and a dangerous seduction of spirit and body caused a simultaneous attraction and repulsion in him that created his own spiritual vertigo" (396).

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[25] Hitchcock's female leads were usually blonde. Consider Madeleine Carroll (*The 39 Steps*), Joan Fontaine (*Suspicion*), Carole Lombard (*Mr. & Mrs. Smith*), Doris Day (*The Man Who Knew Too Much),* Vera Miles (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Psycho*), Janet Leigh (*Psycho*), Kim Novak, Eva Marie Saint (*North By Northwest*), and Tippi Hendrin (*The Birds, Marnie*). When asked why he favored blonde heroines, Hitchcock responded that "blondes make the best victims. They're like virgin snow that shows up the bloody footprints" (Corliss).

I include details of the author biographies here in order to parallel the moves *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* critics often make in the process of trying to understand these texts, and demonstrate the ultimate unhelpfulness of such readings. When an individual reading of the text fails to be fully elucidating, other critical works encounter the same problems, adaptations fail to illuminate anything new, and the passage of time itself doesn't seem to clarify meaning, the last, desperate move is often to grasp onto authorial intent or inspiration. A biographical reading, this chain of logic suggests, comes from a stable and authoritative location that understands the full or original meaning of the text, a meaning that can be learned through studying the author's comments on the film or the author's life. This reading is itself nostalgic and idealizing, looking backwards to find stable meaning in the figure of the auteur, the creative authority. The recent pseudo-biographical film *Hitchcock*, released November 2012, details the process of creating *Psycho*, attempting to find parallels with the film's plot or development in Hitchock's personal life. It makes a similar move in its explanation of *Vertigo*. In the film, Vera Miles (Jessica Biels) tells *Psycho* actress Janet Leigh (Scarlett Johansson), "You know that poor, tortured soul Jimmy Stewart played in Vertigo? That's Hitch, only younger, slimmer, and better looking." Likewise, critics can often fall into the trap of reading a work through its author to the extent that biography overshadows further critical potential. One might, and some—like the *Hitchcock* film—have, looked to Hitchcock's own obsession with the half fictional, half real figure of the Hollywood blonde as the final explanation of the film. Scottie is Hitchcock, and this film is therefore a self-study of the artist's own artistic process. However, such readings fail to realize that idealizing and nostalgic behavior on the part of the author not only mirrors but participates the texts' discussions of how easily such nostalgic idealization gets reflected and repeated in the real world. Biographies will not resolve any of the problems of meaning in *Gatsby* or *Vertigo*.

Neither creator's personal life or statements about their text can offer a solid, authorial intent for the text that creates stable meaning; both artists partake in their text's economy of fascination, suggesting not an ending point in the search for meaning, but simply another ring in the ripple of fascination expanding outward from the text.

Failing an authoritative or authorial reading of either text that does not participate in some way in the texts' properties of fascination, we are ultimately left with the reality of our own frustration—and yet, the attempt to understand and come to terms with the remembered experiences of these texts remains. Along with the tourists who search for Carlotta's non-existent gravestone and those who even more inexplicably search for Gatsby's Golden Coast, critics and adaptors partake in a communal longing for something that never existed, and cannot exist. While studying the complexities of nostalgia in former Soviet countries, Svetlana Boym noted similar complexities within the nostalgic drive itself, on both communal and personal levels: "Nostalgia (from *nostos*—return home, and *algia*—longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (xiii). Boym describes nostalgia visually in cinematic terms as "a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface" (xiv).

Boym's broken frame applies to Daisy's, Gatbsy's, and Judy's falls from grace and their idealizers' reactions. When the ideal figure's criminality is revealed, for a moment two versions of this figure, the ideal and the tactfully ignored real-life referent, exist intolerably in the same person. The frame breaks. The ideal is no longer a mirror for the self, but the revelation of the impossibility of the ideal and the idealizer's own mistake. Daisy is not only not her younger self,

but the Daisy that Gatsby imagines, the incarnation of the good life of status and privilege, also reveals the flaws within this desired status and privilege. Gatsby's "great" American dream is tainted by his criminality, and Nick is forced to realize that the real Jay Gatsby, and the realities of the Dream, are different than the ones he had imagined. Scottie is left with Judy, his counterfeit Madeleine, and the truth of Madeleine's own constructed nature as well as the flawed nature of the patriarchal domestic ideal. Confronted with the reality of the broken frame, all three characters engage in a nostalgic solution—they ignore reality in favor of the old fantasy. Gatsby, Nick, and Scottie cannot cope with a life in which this frame is broken, so they repair it through sheer force of imagination—by once again separating the ideal from its real criminality.

This broken frame, so evident in Daisy's, Gatsby's, and Judy's falls from grace, finds its counterpart for their paradoxical reification as idealized figures of community and belonging in the postmodern nostalgic urge. Boym finds nostalgia at work in the twenty-first century desire for communal identity and collective memory, a result of the industrialization and war that contributed to the noir ethos underlying nostalgic texts such as *Gatsby* and *Vertigo*. This present desire for community is further complicated by increasing globalization and technological interconnectedness: "In counterpoint to our fascination with cyberspace and the virtual global village, there is a no less global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals" (xiv).

If nostalgia is partially defined as the postmodern longing for a lost or seemingly lost object displaced in space and time, then, as Boym suggests, the global entertainment industry,

dominated by western sensibilities, finds release for this longing in providing readily available objects upon which to project this desire:

> [I]n the West objects of the past are everywhere for sale. The past eagerly cohabits the present. Americans are supposed to be antihistorical, yet the souvenirization of the past and obsession with roots and identity here are ubiquitious. One could speak about 'inculcation of nostalgia' into merchandise as a marketing strategy that tricks consumers into missing what they haven't lost...All artifacts of civilization are made available and disposable through mass reproduction; thus the consumer enjoys both the modern convenience and primitive pleasure of fetish possession. Ersatz nostalgia [nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory] promoted by the entertainment industry makes everything time-sensitive and exploits that temporal deficit by giving a cure that is also a poison. (38)

Nostalgic fare often remains curiously blind to this essential irony. Wrapped up in viewing an idealized world, nostalgic consumers often ignore *Vertigo's* and *Gatsby*'s warnings about the dangers of idealizing the past or others. Both texts present a nuanced and often critical representation of their cultural and historical milieu, and attempts to romanticize these texts will inevitably lead to the duplication of Gatsby's and Scottie's disappointment when the ideal is unable to sustain itself under the weight of reality. Beyond the tourism and overt commoditization of "classic" texts, there is a certain amount of "packaging" involved in labeling "Greatest Films of All Time" or "definitive versions" that seeks to provide concrete meaning upon which to focus the experience of reading or viewing these texts. Such titles or reiterations attempt make them comprehensible, or fix them in place and time as "current," as well as romantically antique. Likewise, nostalgic critical readings often obscure both texts' unapologetically flawed reifications of fundamentally flawed American identities. It is easier for the reader or viewer to fawn over *Gatsby*'s flappers and fanfare or delight in Vertigo's dark romance and beautiful visuals than confront identity crises in the American past, and their potential reflections in the American present.

Perhaps what we can take from these cultural texts, finally, is the nostalgic image of itself upon which present-day America is built, and the way Americans contribute to this ideal. America seems to consider itself many things, representative of the free world, beacon/deacon of democracy, and—the most controversial—world police by merit of its own economic, cultural, political, and military influence. Most of these self-definitions are predicated on the fundamental belief in American power and internal security. Post-9/11 America, I would suggest, is presently faced with both a crisis of identity and a need to return to normalcy akin to Gatsby's, Nick's, and Scottie's realization of the broken frame and their flawed ideal. Years after the attacks, the memory of the events of 9/11 and its associated trauma for national identity persists, but the nation is faced with an equally overwhelming need to return to normalcy. The last anniversary of September 11, 2012, marked the first time that major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* did not include even a mention of the attacks on their front pages. *New York Times* public editor Margaret Sullivan responded to confusion and indignation about this "forgotten" anniversary by reminding readers that "the pain, the outrage, the loss—these never fade. The amount of journalism, however, must" (Beaujon and Moos). However, this process of returning to normalcy began much sooner. In a Sept. 27, 2001 speech at O'Hare Airport, then-President George Bush urged Americans not to acquiesce to fear:

> When [the terrorists] struck, they wanted to create an atmosphere of fear. And one of the great goals of this nation's war is to restore public confidence in the airline industry. It's to tell the traveling public: Get on board. Do your business around the country. Fly and enjoy American's great destination spots. Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed. (Bush)

The attacks irreparably shook America's conceptions of its security within its own borders, unbreached since Pearl Harbor and never breached on the North American continent. Cultural and artistic responses to the attacks have run the gambit between panic about the lost illusion of

the all-powerful America to these and other suggestions that this trauma to American self-definition must be ignored or overridden. The nostalgic message of these reifying voices after the profound re-evaluation of the strength and safety engrained in the American cultural mythos is one of return. America as untouchable is an idealization of irreparably altered historical reality, but one that they continue to support, much as noir supports its eternal struggle towards wholeness and continuity between past and present, not because this vision of America is unerringly factual, but because it is necessary in order for America to continue existing as it did in the past—to keep moving sideways, if not forward.

The redefinition or reaffirming of American identity, however, is still in progress, and it is uncertain at this point which cultural voices will prevail. National identity is at a crossroads; we can choose to ignore reality as best we can and hold onto past feelings of power and security in order to keep our global position of power, or we can move into unknown territory by acknowledging the problem that the presence and action of global terrorism poses to the image of the all-powerful America. The result would be something entirely different, the shattering of the image rather than its preservation. What might have happened, we may wonder, to Gatsby, Nick, or Scottie had they not chosen to continue believing in their ideal? Such an action would remove the self-constructed cage of their idealization and allow them to genuinely move forward from idealization into something new, though what that new state would be is beyond the scope of either text because it would break all of their established patterns of character, narrative, critical, and authorial reflection. Imagining the effects on American identity if the full reality of 9/11's implications for American security, power, and global influence were universally accepted is also, at present, beyond my ability to predict. What comes next after the choice to forego the past in favor of moving forward into the future generally is. I hope that the recognition

of nostalgic idealization's ripple effect would lead to at least a moment of self-critical clear-sightedness about the role of the individual and the community in perpetuating fascination. The human tendency towards nostalgia will likely never fade, but the realization of our condition and the consequences of idealization through the examples of the past and texts like *Gatsby* and *Vertigo* might give us the courage to face "the triumph that feels like defeat," the choice of reality over fantasy.

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